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OF THE

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on 18 July, 2018

LOVE AND VALOUR.

VOL. III.

LOVE AND VALOUR.

BY

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8982

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1871.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

LOVE AND VALOUR.

CHAPTER I.

THE BATTLE OF BREMNING MINOR.

"GOOD MORNING, Mrs. Harding," said Philip, entering at the parsonage-gate just as Prue was coming out—"good morning. You are astir early. Some errand of charity, I presume?"

"If early rising be due to charitable motives, may I ask on what mission of mercy Mr. Philip Charlwood is out at eight in the morning?"

"I am going on a mission the birds will

consider anything but one of mercy. I want a brace or two to send to a friend in town."

"But can't you put it off till later?—I'm afraid you will wake baby out of her nap after breakfast."

Philip was puzzled.

"I don't quite understand. Wake baby."

"Yes," said Prue innocently. "I met you coming into our garden, and when you said you were after some birds I supposed they were on our lawn."

"Ha! ha! now you're poking fun, I'm afraid, as the Yankees say. The truth is, that as I was passing the gate on my way to the keeper's I saw you coming down the lawn, and just stepped in to bid you good morning."

"Dear! that was very kind of you. But how tall you must be to see over our gate!"

"Oh, there was no necessity for my seeing over it—I could see through it, you know."

"Ah, I forgot you lawyers are educated to see through things. But I did think that inch-thick oak-plank might have defied the eye of the law."

"I suppose it is a gimblet-eye which no timber can resist."

"Oh, you don't mean that you have been boring holes in our gate!"

"No! not for worlds"—and here Philip couldn't help giving a return thrust—"not for worlds, though spying is one of the pleasant customs of this little Eden."

"Ah, you see, all country places abound in curiosity and scandal."

"Heaven defend me from living in the country!"

"Oh, why? Honest, respectable people

don't mind the prying of their neighbours. You surely can't prefer London to this delightful village?—in fact, I won't hear even you so misreported even by yourself, for you seem to find it almost impossible to tear yourself away from Bremning."

"Well, you see, a fellow must have a little regard for domestic ties. But I assure you I don't like the country, it is so uncomfortable and unpunctual."

"Dear! what a pity you came down here!"

"That regret sounded very sincere, Mrs. Harding."

"Did it? Ah, well, I can sympathise with people who have unpleasant duties, so I suppose I can appreciate your discomfort here."

"It is very good of you. I am sure I am much obliged for the interest you kindly

take in me. I feel I have done nothing to deserve it."

"The relation in which I stand to your sister," said Prue sharply and distinctly, "should explain the interest I take in her brother."

"Ah, to be sure—yes, you and she are great friends, I believe, and it is really very kind of you, because she is so very young and silly. I am sure she ought to be grateful to you."

"I don't wish that, Mr. Charlwood. I wish I could influence one so young and—and inexperienced, so as to prevent her being imposed on or deceived."

"In what way?" asked Philip coldly.

"By a man, Mr. Philip Charlwood, who does not love her, and who, if he had a spark of honour, would not try the faith of a girl affianced to one who is absent."

"Oh, is *that* the imposition? I thought you were alluding to Mr. Edward Harding. He has not been heard of, by the way, has he, since he left England?"

"You are speaking of my brother-in-law, sir," said Prue haughtily.

"Yes, but not of mine, I hope."

There had been some pretty fencing up to this point with only just the least little bit of temper in the exchanges. But now the swords were out in real earnest, and the foils were flung aside.

"You have tried to obtain your hope by all means, fair or foul, Mr. Philip Charlwood. Mr. Edward Harding is a man of honour, I should be sorry to see him the brother-in-law of any one who has not the same claim to the title of gentleman."

"I am delighted to hear your unprejudiced opinion of Mr. Harding's honour. I pre-

sume you do not consider a man's claim to that title injured supposing he has to leave Oxford on account of debt."

"Certainly not, if he pays his debts. Mr. Edward Harding does not owe a shilling at Oxford."

Philip was compelled to own to himself that this was a "hit—a palpable hit"—but he returned to the attack.

"And what do you think of a poor man who wins the heart of a rich but inexperienced girl surreptitiously?"

"Mr. Philip Charlwood, you are uttering what is false, and what you know to be false," said Prue, confronting Philip with flashing eyes. She owned to James afterwards that she had for a brief second wished herself a man that she might strike Edward's belier then and there. "It is false, Mr. Philip Charlwood. Edward Harding wooed

your sister openly and honestly, and went to your father in an upright and straightforward manner. How your father treated him, I need not say; you know, and I dare say approve of it."

"I do not approve of a father bestowing a daughter who will be rich some day on the first penniless man who comes to ask for her."

"Edward Harding is not a penniless man, Mr. Charlwood; he is a gentleman serving his queen and country in the field—not living at ease on the proceeds of chicanery and quibbling; and let me tell you also, Mr. Charlwood, that your family might consider itself honoured by an alliance with the Hardings. My family was as wealthy as yours, sir, but it has reason to be proud of my marrying a Harding."

"Ah, your uncle doesn't think so, though."

That hit must score to Philip. He had been a little overmatched hitherto, for Prue had the right on her side, but now she had laid herself open to the retort which long experience at the bar enabled Philip to turn upon her with.

"That is no business of yours, sir," was all Prue could reply, and that was rude, and nothing more.

"Ah, Mrs. Harding, if we would but all of us attend to our own business! If you, for instance, would not take so untiring an interest in my sister's movements"——

"Stop, Mr. Charlwood! When Edward Harding went away—when your father had turned your sister out of doors, and she sought the protection of our roof, her affianced lover gave her to me as a sacred charge—as sacred as a charge received at a death-bed, for who knows whether he may

return? I consider that I have a right to watch over her with a sisterly, almost motherly affection. I have as much right as yourself."

"Pshaw, Mrs. Harding! you know this is sentimental nonsense. Let us talk like sensible people. That silly girl plighted her troth to Mr. Harding when she did not know her own mind. He, apparently, has forgotten all about her"——

"How dare you say that?"

"My dear madam, we may as well discuss this quietly. Pray be patient. I was going to say that he has apparently forgotten all about her, for she has received not a line from him since they parted."

"I am not sure that Edward Harding would write, for he might have known Mr. Charlwood would not scruple to open his letters; but, leaving that out of the question,

we have not heard from him because the first mail after his arrival in India was lost in the Red Sea, and he was probably ordered off at once into the disturbed districts, where, if he had time to write, he would not have the opportunity of posting."

"You should have been a special pleader, Mrs. Harding."

"If that is intended for a compliment, sir, I must beg to decline it. I consider a paid advocate must sacrifice conscience and principle to his profession. I am no paid advocate—I simply speak the truth."

"Surely you do not suppose I have received a retainer from my father in the case of Charlwood *v.* Harding?"

"I really can't tell, Mr. Charlwood, any more than I can guess your retainer—I think that was what you called it—in the case of Lysaght *v.* Harding; but, whatever it is, and

however large the reward, you have certainly more than earned it. You have conducted the case with consummate skill from the beginning, and there is nothing that you have not sacrificed for it."

Philip smiled. He couldn't help smiling, for he felt it was true that he had conducted his case with excellent tact and judgment. Prue saw the smile, and hated him for it.

"Oh, I know what your smile means now, Mr. Charlwood. I ought to have understood it the first day you came here, with professions of friendship and a pretence of peace-making. I hated you then—I know why I hated you now."

Philip bowed.

"You do me too much honour, under the circumstances, to speak to me. Good morning."

"Stop, Mr. Charlwood; you were coming

to see Mr. Harding, I presume, when I met you"——

"Oh dear, no! It was for the pleasure of seeing you."

"Me?"

"Yes, entirely. I guessed you would be going out for a stroll, and as two young people in whom I take an interest were going out for a walk, and one of them has not much more stay to make here, I was desirous of prevailing on you to let them alone for once."

"Coward!" said little Prue, growing crimson with anger.

She felt he had outwitted her, and in a most unworthy way, and she was angry with both herself and him.

There was a little pause. Philip felt he had gone a little too far, and was silent. Prue was too angry to speak.

At last she found words. With an enforced calm she pointed to the gate, and said quietly, but with great intensity—

"Mr. Philip Charlwood, there lies the gate of the parsonage, inside which I never wish to see you again."

"Your wishes in this case are commands, madam. But as you forbid me the house perhaps you will convey to Mr. Harding the intelligence which I intended to bring to him this afternoon."

"I will convey any message to him."

"Will you tell him that I greatly regret that all the eloquence and arguments of a 'paid advocate' have failed to induce my father to restore the chaplain's salary of which he felt it his duty to deprive him?"

"I never expected Mr. Charlwood to restore that—any more than I should expect Mr. Philip Charlwood to advise its restoration."

"Oh, I'm very averse from my father's retaining it, and so you see I've proposed that he shall start a chaplain, and as I occasionally read prayers to the servants, I think of drawing the salary myself. In fact, my father has promised it to me in the event of its not returning to Mr. Harding. Pray present my compliments to him—I wish you a very good morning."

He took off his hat, and Prue bowed very low in return.

"I wish you good morning, sir. I am glad to hear that prayers are occasionally read at the manor-house. I have half feared from the practices of its inhabitants that no Christian observances were kept up."

"Thank you," Philip retorted, as he closed the gate, "we have not been very regular always, but now that I am to be *paid*, I've no doubt I shall feel as earnest as a real clergyman. Good day!"

With that he strode off, rather delighted than otherwise at his little encounter. It was to him what putting on the gloves with a clever amateur is to a practised boxer. It was pleasant exercise which more than repaid the pain of a chance tap or two.

"Egad, she's a plucky little woman. Ought to have been a man and at the bar—she hits out straight from the shoulder. Gave me a nasty one or two. But I think she will feel the punishment most. And now for these birds I told her of at first to keep her quiet. I know where to find the brace." So saying, Philip walked briskly off in the direction which Marcus and Bella had taken when he dropped in to intercept Prue.

Poor Prue did feel the punishment. When the excitement was over, she kept recalling some of Philip's cruel taunts, and

it ended in her going upstairs and taking Prue the Second, who was her confidante in all troubles, in her lap, and crying very hard for some time, to the wondering distress of Martha Ogleby, who was firmly convinced that some of the things must have gone wrong in the wash—such losses being connected in her mind with the spectacle of her mother weeping because "them dratted tramps had been stealing again—how ever the squire's cambric handkerchers was to be replaced she couldn't tell." Martha viewed the world from two stand-points—one was baby, and the other was washing—and whatever she did not perceive through one or the other of these mediums she looked upon with a stolid wonder and bewilderment that made her a very difficult subject to deal with. Washing she had been born to—baby was the only acquired taste she

had, and she referred everything in the world to these two prime causes. So in this case, as she knew baby was quite well and very good, being, in fact, asleep, she fell back on the linen, and supposing Prue's grief was due to some error about the number of things that had gone and the number of things that had come back from the wash, started off to the linen cupboard in the spare room and went carefully over the whole of the basket, comparing the articles with the items in the bill.

So Prue had the nursery to herself, where she was by-and-by discovered by her husband, still sobbing over baby. He was, of course, surprised at her sorrow, and asked its cause, and so with a few tears and gulps the little champion went over her fight with Philip.

James looked very grave here and there,

but he felt that Philip had been attacked first, and that Prue had, to the best of her power, given as good as she took. So he felt he could not quarrel with Charlwood for standing on the defensive.

As for the loss of the two hundred a year, it was a loss he owned, especially with Prue the Second and her future to be taken into consideration, but he must do as best he could. He wished the parish were in better order, so that he could take pupils without feeling he was neglecting his duty.

With regard to Bella, he could only repeat what he had said before—that she was unworthy of Ted, that the family would be anything but a desirable connection, and that Edward would probably survive this disappointment as he had another.

But Prue was not so easily satisfied.

Whether Bella was worthy or not, she had been left in her care, and she was bound to cling to her charge to the last.

"I remember Edward said about the Balaklava charge that, though it was utterly useless and purposeless, it was the duty of the men to charge when they had the orders. I have orders to guard Bella, and, let her be worth whatever she may, I must fight for her till the last!"

"You're a courageous little woman, Prue; but you owe me a duty, too, which is, not to kill yourself with worry."

"Never fear, James," said the little woman, smiling up at him through her tears.

"Please'm," said Martha Ogleby, entering radiant, "I've a-counted 'em, and there *ain't* none missin'—on'y one o' the young Miss Challood's hanshykers come home instead o' yourn."

"It's quite right, Martha, I dare say. I hadn't counted them."

"Aw!" said Martha, and collapsed.

She knew it was not baby, and now she had learnt it was not the linen. Both these explanations failing there was only one other alternative open to Martha—"Tisn't Miss Prue, and tisn't the clothes—well, then it's somethin'." And somethin' not being either of the first two alternatives was in reality nothing to Martha, who relapsed into her old calm puzzle as to what the world, with the exception of baby and the washing, could possibly be, what it was meant for, and why it went on as it did.

How many of my lady readers, especially in the present dearth of good servants, must be longing to engage this domestic treasure!

Meanwhile Mr. Philip, piping a lively whistle, stepped out gaily along the road

where he expected to meet Marcus and Bella. He had brought his friend to the point a few days before by hinting that when he wished him to flirt with Bella he did not expect he would carry the game so far, and make love so desperately. Marcus had of his own free will been thinking that he had made a conquest of Bella, and calculating how much old C. would give her, and whether she would not look very charming as the Countess of Mountgarret, so that this very mild expostulation of his friend's settled the question.

"My dear boy, I should not have ventured to trifle with her affection in such a manner. The fact is, you see, that I really entertain a deep pasion for her—a love that I should have ere this asked her seriously to allow and return, if that confounded little she-parson had given me a fair chance."

"My dear Marcus, I am indeed delighted. By Jove, the dream of my life—that my most intimate friend should marry my sister." (And then he said to himself, "That two hundred is potted.") "Marcus, shake hands. I congratulate you and myself—I know she loves you—and as for that Mrs. Harding, I'll get her out of the way."

"A thousand thanks, Philip. But how and when?"

"When? to-morrow morning. How? leave that to me!"

So it was agreed that the following morning Marcus should take Bella out for a walk to a romantic little plantation where there was a picturesque water-mill and a small lake (it was a pond actually)—a scene of which Bella was very fond, because it reminded her of so many novels—and that then and there he should declare his love.

When Philip reached the stile leading into the plantation he paused.

"Better not go any farther. I might just drop in on them as he was popping the question."

So he sat down on the stile, lit a cigar, and made a mental inventory of the luxuries on which he would expend his extra two hundred a year.

CHAPTER II.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

VERY earnestly and impatiently did the little garrison of Ungawallah wait for the dawn. Every man was under arms, and all fretted for the time to come when they might sally out and attack their besiegers.

It was impossible altogether to overlook the fact that the Sepoys considerably outnumbered the 203rd. But they would be taken by surprise and so attacked at an advantage, and with the little garrison to take them in the rear, would be in but a poor plight.

Of late, since the blowing up of the powder-waggons, there had been better watch kept on the fort by the mutineers, but they were so secure, they thought, from attack from without, that they did not post sentries except towards the fortress.

The grey dawn broke rapidly, and the stars went in rapidly, for there is little twilight in those chimes. It had been a long watch for morning, but not a man had nodded for one instant, lest perchance he should lose a second's start in the race to meet the foe.

Everything sounded very distinctly to the eager, listening ears in Ungawallah fortress. The stamp of the steed, the rattle of his halter-chain, the tramp of the patrol, and the noise of his accoutrements came clearly on the wind. And as the day lightened and broadened, they heard the regular tread of

a large body of men, and trembled lest they should wake the foe. But the foe were not listening for it as they were. And so the Berkshire Rifles came on the scene.

There was a ringing cheer.

Then came the shrieks of the terrified sepoys, turning out of their tents half awake to meet the avenging steel, as our gallant fellows rushed on in a race to be the first at the enemy.

Out poured the garrison with a fierce shout and fell on the mutineers in the rear. They struck with a will, and when they fired they brought down their men, for they had a score to clear off, and would not waste a single shot at random.

The fight was not a long one. The slaughter was great. The 203rd attacked the sepoy camp about the centre, having come up under shelter of a tamarind grove, which

at this point ran close to the lines. The mutineers at the two extremes of the camp got under arms with all haste, and hastened to support their fellows, but the sally of the garrison alarmed them. They were ignorant of the numbers of the enemy, and supposed they were surrounded, for they believed it impossible that the garrison could be acting in concert with the reliefs—how could they have been communicated with? After a brief halt, in which their leaders tried to rally them, they fairly broke and fled. The Rifles were too tired with their forced march to pursue them far, and the garrison was too small for the purpose, not to mention that it too was wearied out with watching and fighting.

But the 203rd followed the fugitives to a brow of the slope, beyond which spread by the banks of the river long levels of

rice-ground and thence fired after the flying wretches volley after volley as long as they were in range.

Then came the rest from marching and fighting and the meeting of the rescuers and the rescued. They had been too much occupied to take much notice of each other til then.

The little garrison was rapturous in its gratitude. There was such a collation got up immediately for the 203rd on the spot, the ladies setting out all sorts of provisions, and waiting on their deliverers with merry alacrity; and the brave fellows, who had found a fine appetite on their march, did justice to the entertainment. That night the 203rd encamped—in the tents of the departed sepoys—in front of the fort, which was not large enough to accommodate them.

The next morning a council of war was

held. The 203rd was bound to push on to effect a junction with the reliefs marching on Lucknow. The little garrison could not be left at Ungawallah, and yet there were no means of transport for the women and children, for the sepoys had gone off with all the horses, with the exception of those which on the night of the mutiny were ridden by the officers. What was to be done?

The commanding officer of the Berkshire Rifles offered to leave a company—or even two—at the fort, and march on with the rest to join the main body, which, after relieving Lucknow, might despatch a force to Ungawallah to convey the garrison to a place of safety.

But those who had been imprisoned so long in the fort were most unwilling to undertake a further captivity on their own accord. They would undergo any hardships rather

than that—the ladies especially declaring they would rather march afoot with the 203rd than submit to another day's stay in the fort. And no wonder! The enemy had so nearly succeeded in the attempt to drive a mine that the fort did not appear at all a safe place. The gleaming bayonets of the gallant 203rd were a better protection than the frowning walls of Ungawallah.

It was quite plain, however, that, willing as they might be, the ladies were incapable of facing the fatigues of the march. It was not easy to devise any plan for their transportation, but stop in the fort they could not and would not.

Fortunately, while they were in dire perplexity on this point, Ted remembered that something had been said by the native who brought him to Ungawallah, about there being boats in the possession of the mutineers.

Search was made, and three small boats and a couple of flats, which had been used in conveying provender, were found in a creek a little below the fort. Here was an unexpected means of escape. The boats were launched and brought up to a convenient landing-place, where they were inspected and leaks looked for and stopped. It was agreed that, as there were no sweeps discoverable in the flats, they should be towed by two of the smaller boats. If they could only get to Kholaghur, which was now in the possession of a regiment of infantry and a detachment of artillery, they would be safe. Kholaghur had been abandoned by the mutineers after a massacre of the whites, but was occupied by a large force *en route* for Lucknow. The heavy artillery, having been found to retard seriously the advance of the relief, was left here with one regi-

ment of foot, and was in a strongly-entrenched position.

A company of the 203rd was to be left to form an escort and to man the boats—the women, children, wounded, and invalids, were to be put on board the flats. The third small boat was also to be manned, and to act as a sort of tender to assist in towing where there were rapids, or to render aid if any boat ran aground.

Finally, it was determined that the fortress of Ungawallah should be blown up. It had originally been a native fort, and before the days of gunpowder must have been almost impregnable. But the near success of the mutineers in undermining it betrayed its weakness, and it was therefore agreed that it should be blown up.

At his special request, Edward Harding was left behind with the company. He was

appointed to steer the boat which was to act as tender, Tom Martindale taking the rudder in the first, and Tom Friston in the second, of the towing-boats.

It was agreed that the river expedition should start late at night, and that the regiment should march on the following morning, after firing a train which should blow up the magazine of the fort. Although they were so glad to escape from it, and so loth to prolong their stay there, the little garrison could not find it in their hearts to overthrow the walls that had sheltered them from the savage foe. But besides this it was thought as well that the fugitives should have got a fair start ere the noise of the explosion alarmed the villages in the immediate neighbourhood. It was more than possible that the sepoys might have rallied in considerable numbers in some such places

in the vicinity, and the women and children should be placed in comparative safety before the bellow of the explosion, the tremor of the earth, and the great column of smoke should tell the lurking foe that Ungawallah was no more.

Late at night, when the moon shed its glittering light on the turbulent flood, and showered its glimmering touches of silver upon the trees and rocks above the river—when all was silent save for the wash of the waters, the moan of a night-bird, or the cry of the jackal—the boats put off, and their occupants waved a silent adieu to the group of officers and men of the 203rd that had gathered to see them off.

As Edward was stepping into his boat the surgeon of his regiment came up to him.

"Look here, Harding," said he, "there are several children in arms in those boats,

and the exposure to the night air, and the worry and anxiety their mothers have undergone lately, may make them peevish. But their crying might lead the enemy to you, so I've put some quieting compounds in this bottle—a sort of Daffy, you know—a drop or two of which will quiet them. I meant to give it to one of the ladies, but as you have a roving commission, it will be more handy with you after all, perhaps. I have had some lint and bandages and a composing draught or two put on board the second boat, which contains the sick and wounded. I wish you a safe voyage! Good-bye!"

Edward stepped into his boat and pushed off. All the oars had been carefully muffled, so that there was very little noise. He ordered his men to pull gently up stream alongside the flats, which were waiting for

his signal to start. He inquired in each boat if all was right, and everybody safely aboard, and then, having made sure of this, gave the word to his crew to give way and get ahead a bit. Then he gave a low whistle—the men in the towing-boats bent over their oars, and then the towing-lines grew taut, and the flats began to toil up stream. They were off!

The river was swollen with recent rains, and flowed with great force, sweeping at times round a bend with such impetuosity that Edward's boat had on several occasions to lend a hand at the tow-rope. It was terribly tedious work, as towing always is, but it seemed more than ordinarily slow to the fugitives. They made such small progress that some of those who longed to put as much distance as possible between them and the scene of their dangers grew weary

of watching how long they were in passing objects on the shore.

Thus they rowed steadily on until dawn, when fortunately they found themselves entering a jungle. It had been a question of doubt among them whether it would be better to lie-to and try to conceal themselves by day, or to press on at all risks. The jungle, which ran along the course of the river on both sides, allowed them still to press on, while it concealed them from observation.

It was very difficult work to thread the river, which was here and there divided into separate channels by islets or rocks. It then became Edward's duty to find out which channel was navigable. The search often occupied some time. In one or two cases the water in the best channel was so shallow that they had to get out and push the boats

over them. But they worked away with stern and silent determination.

"By Jove! Tom," whispered Edward, as they succeeded, after immense exertion, in getting the boats over one of the worst shallows, "if the beggars are in possession of any forts, or indeed any position, along the river, we must run the gauntlet, for we can't come back. We should get aground, and be murdered at their leisure."

"You're right, Ted; and yet we can hardly expect the river to deepen as we go higher, so that our chances are poor ones any way. Does any one know whether there's a fort between here and Kholaghur?"

Edward did not know, but he would inquire. There was little hope of finding any one acquainted with the country, but he questioned all. Luckily the civil engineer, who had been inspector of the defences at

Ungawallah, had some years since resided at Kholaghur. While there he had been employed by a speculative nabob, who thought he could grow cotton in the neighbourhood, to survey the stream with a view to canalisation. He reported that to the best of his recollection there were no forts, or even villages, between Kholaghur and Ungawallah; but there was, a few miles above the jungle, a large overhanging rock, on which were the ruins of a native fortification, reputed to have been the stronghold of a tribe of robbers.

The robbers were swept away some years ago, but he feared their position might be occupied—if the sepoys knew of the route they were going to take—and would give the enemy such an immense advantage that all the crews of the boats could be shot down without a chance of defending themselves or retaliating.

Edward went back to Tom, and told him what the engineer said.

"Take him into your boat, Ted, and let him report how far we are from the rock. We must take a rest before we come there. My fellows, in spite of relieving each other every hour or so, are getting knocked up."

"We had better halt at the end of the jungle, and serve out rations; then look to our arms, pull on quietly till we get in sight of the bluff, and then let go for dear life."

Go and fetch the engineer, Ted, and then we'll arrange plans."

Edward pulled back and took the engineer on board.

"Well, Mr. Martyn," said Tom, when the boats were alongside again, "how's the river there?"

"Pretty broad, and quite deep enough for boats of our draught."

"Which side is the bluff?"

"The one I chiefly refer to is on our right; but on the opposite bank is an answering eminence, not so high, if I remember right, but so densely wooded as to afford ample cover to sharpshooters."

"Is the ascent of the bluff from the land side difficult?"

"I should say not, for it is covered with a grove of trees, and is, as far as I can recall, a gentle slope."

"We must have a forlorn hope, gentlemen," said Tom. "A few of us must be put ashore a little before we come to the bluff, and must make a rush up it and try to distract their attention while the boats get by."

"Let us hope the precaution won't be needed," said one of the civilians in Tom's boat; "but I'm ready to go, for one."

"We must have soldiers, I'm afraid," said Tom. "Sorry to disappoint you; but, you see, a handful of discipline in a case like this is better than oceans of pluck."

"Well, I suppose you'll let me go as 'a little one in,' if I want?" said the other.

"No; you must stop and help along the boats."

"Well, I'll obey orders," said the civilian.

"The forlorn hope had better land in this boat, and haul it up. In case the bluff is not occupied they can return, launch it, and soon catch us up," suggested Edward.

"Each boat must trust to itself and look after itself, for you must try and carry off the women—not stop to fight."

"Better to lose a few than all—there would be no time for rescue."

"We are getting near the end of the jungle," said Mr. Martyn, the engineer: "a

few strokes round that point will bring us in sight of the bluff."

"Easy all!" said Tom, "pull for shore."

The boats rowed to the bank, and their occupants landed. Rations were then served out, and the weary oarsmen stretched their tired limbs on the sward and snatched a few minutes' rest.

"Mr. Martyn," said Tom, drawing the engineer a little apart from the spot where the terrified women—terrified, yet quite unconscious of the new danger immediately impending—were sitting. "Mr. Martyn, do you think I can get anywhere near the place without fear of discovery?"

"Yes, the banks are wooded on both sides."

"A good idea—I can wade along close in shore and reconnoitre. Tell Harding where I've gone.

Tom was gone about an hour, and came back with bad tidings. He had got as far as a bend of the stream whence he could see two or three sepoys posted on the bank. He could not tell how many there were on the bluff, but it was evident that preparations had been made to cut them off.

There was no use trying to conceal the danger longer. It was equally useless to think of turning back. So they called the little party together and told them of the dire peril before them. Tom had carefully reconnoitred, and he recommended that the forlorn hope should land at the bend where he had stopped, and push on to the knoll, the boats waiting for five minutes, and then starting at racing pace. It was to be clearly understood that each boat with its attendant flat must look after its own interests. There must be no pause to help the others, for

such a delay would involve all in the slaughter.

Then came the volunteering for the forlorn hope. Tom explained that it must consist entirely of soldiers. Every soldier was ready to volunteer for the desperate duty, so at last it was determined that they should cast lots. And a lot fell on Tom Martindale, but Edward Harding was not of the number.

Next they cast lots who should be in the first boat, and Edward Harding's place was to be there, but Mary was to go in the second boat.

Edward tried hard to persuade Tom to change places with him, but Tom would not listen to him. If they, the principal leaders of the little expedition, vacillated, what could they expect of the men?

"Take care of Mary as far as you can,

Ted. Good-bye. God bless you, old fellow! Save my poor child if you can!" They wrung each other's hands warmly.

And then followed the parting of Tom from his wife and child, which I dare not attempt to describe.

Last of all the little boat with the forlorn hope put off, keeping well under the bank. The two other boats with the flats in tow got out into mid-stream, the men bending over their oars, waiting for the signal to start. Tom Friston steered the first boat, Mr. Martyn the second. Edward Harding stood in the bows of Friston's boat, watch in hand, waiting to give the word as quietly as if he had been holding the bung for a college race on old Isis.

"Are you ready?"

"Ready."

"Off!"—and away they went.

CHAPTER III.

NOT OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE, BUT ON WITH THE NEW.

BELLA CHARLWOOD had selected a most romantic spot for the scene of the proposal. It was just the place to suit so very sentimental a young lady.

Vale Farm—in reality it was only a watermill—was situated at the foot of a wooded slope. About half-way up the hill-side there was a spring issuing from a cave, locally reported to have been the haunt of a highwayman. A narrow channel conducted the stream to a good-sized pool, origin-

ally, perhaps, an artificial reservoir, but now so neglected as to appear a natural lake of small dimensions. Thence the water was conveyed for a few yards underground in iron pipes, which then, supported on two ivy-covered stone piers, carried it over a plashy briar-grown hollow to turn the huge wheel of the mill. Having performed its task, the emancipated brooklet boiled out below the mill and flowed away across the meadows in the plain below, where its course might be traced by the pollard-willows along its banks, until it joined the distant river.

It was a very pretty scene, with plenty of charming bits for an artist's pencil. There was the dark chasm whence the brook sprang, with plumes of hartstongue waving above it, with trails of ivy or sprays of dog-rose and blackberry looped across it; with a young sapling

spiring up slender and green from a ledge where the wind had carried a stray seed. Above the arch ran the road which meandered down to the mill—a road with a south aspect, so that the bank beyond it, overgrown with privet and whitethorn, was a rare basking-ground for the choicest butterflies, which fluttered up in crowds when you passed. Above this was a belt of pines and firs, their sombre greenery clear-cut against the sky, while the sunlight glowed brightly on their red and silvery stems.

Sparkling and prattling as it issued from its dark prison in the hill-side, the brook hastened on to the pool, refreshing the herbage on its banks with such clear cool sprinklings of dew that a brighter emerald graced the feathery fern-fronds; while the spires of foxgloves towered higher and the snowy flowers of the bramble bloomed more

thickly where they bent over the little thread of water.

The pool was a deep, quiet, calm mirror, reflecting the grey boles of the beeches and the graceful foliage of the horse-chestnuts that hung over it, and giving back with increased intensity the blue of the clear sky above all.

The stream was reputed to be a petrifying spring—and, indeed, it deposited on the huge wheel such flakes of hard lime that it seemed to turn it into stone—so that, if you struck it, it did not give back the dull sound of wood, but the sharp, almost metallic, ring of stone. Whether it was the peculiarity of the water, or some peculiar species of weed growing in it, that gave the pool its strange colour, I know not, but there was a vivid blue-green about its depths that reminded one of a scene-painter's idea of the bottom

of the sea, rather than of nature. It would hardly have surprised one had the wine-dark gloom dissipated to reveal below the water nymphs sporting, or some river god asleep upon his urn. Beyond the pool was an orchard filled with quaint masses of rock (a soft, crumbling rock, identical in character with the lime deposit of the stream) which gave a weird strange look to the place.

But for a few trifling things—such as the busy hum of the waterwheel, the presence of some articles of dab-wash on the hedges, and the smell of cooking (wafted from the mill chimney, which was on a level with the pool, so abrupt was the descent to the wheel)—trifling things that spoke plainly of modern times and civilisation, you might have imagined the orchard, pool, and cave the haunt of some wicked magician or ogre. Those fantastic rocks were the knights who,

failing to overthrow the wicked one, were by him changed into stone. That cave is the entrance hall of his vast palace—if you peer into the gloom you may almost fancy you see the usual horn suspended beside the gate. That mysterious pool is the prison in which he conceals the princess to rescue whom so many knights have fought and failed.

No wonder, then, if your prosy novelist is so carried away by the romance of the spot, that Bella should be so much attached to it.

Hither, then, she led Marcus Lysaght early on the morning of the day of the Battle of Bremning Minor.

It was a beautiful morning. The long blue shadows stretched far across the grass, over which now and then flitted little patches of shade cast by the flying fleeces overhead. The trees were touched as with

a loving hand with the melancholy glories of autumn. A little tinge of melancholy is needed to make anything exquisitely enjoyable—the small black speck in a rosy apple heightens the beauty of the colour, and hints that it is perishable. And this perishableness makes it the more dear to us, for we weary of and do not value—we poor perishable creatures—that which is everlasting and unchangeable. Our nature cannot grasp it. And so the golden and russet, the crimson and purple, glories of autumn make the season very dear to us all.

It had not been too dry an autumn, and the fields were green and velvety in the early dawn, glittering with dew drops, and sprinkled with daisies. The larks were aloft twinkling against the sky, and there was a hum and stir—a sort of praise-giving murmur—in the air, as Marcus and Bella

passed over the Lea on their way to Vale Farm. There was a wishing-well on the Lea, where a tiny thread of water trilled into a mossy stone basin. Of course Bella could not resist the temptation of going and drinking some of the mystic spring, and breathing a wish over it. Marcus readily fell in with the idea, and they each took a draught in the hollow of their hand, in accordance with the superstitious regulations of the spot.

Marcus had won a great advantage over Edward Harding by the readiness with which he humoured Bella's romantic vagaries. To her he appeared to approve of and share in all her sentimental notions, but the truth was he only humoured them, whereas Ted—who was, in his own way, romantic enough himself, more so than Marcus—had rather snubbed some of her choice follies.

Marcus Lysaght was more of a man of the world than Ted, whose experience of life was won in no wider field than the University, while Marcus had from his youth moved much in fashionable life. A capital dancer, and much in request at balls and parties of every description, Marcus had learnt how to make himself agreeable.

He knew that in life, as at a ball, you are constantly changing partners and *vis-à-vis*. You are introduced to a young lady to dance one set of quadrilles with her, and then, probably, never to meet her again. It is, therefore, wise to learn a method by which to put yourself on an easy footing with one with whom your acquaintance is fated to be so short, but on whom you wish to leave a favourable impression, or at any rate not to leave an unfavourable one. Marcus's secret was simple enough. He endeavoured

to find out as briefly as possible the particular tastes of the lady he danced with, and, having done so, to identify himself with them.

In this way he charmed Miss Chasuble by talking High Church, Miss Serious by his evangelical proclivities, Miss Ranter, by his admiration of Spurgeon, Miss Canter, by his opinion of Cumming. He talked Toryism with the Hon. Miss Evelyn Trueblue, daughter of the Earl of Highandry, and rabid Radicalism with Miss Jenny, daughter of Mr. Staple, the cotton-spinner. He was poetical with Miss Flighty, historical with Miss Crammer, philanthropical with Miss Misshins, and absurd with Miss Giggle. He was enabled to do this effectively. It did not require any great depth of reading to keep a little ahead of each lady in her particular walk, and his memory was a good one.

From this training, therefore, he was quite prepared to go with Bella in her admiration of romance. He did, indeed, read a great many novels himself, always knocking off a chapter or two with his cigar after breakfast; but he read them as a sort of counter-irritant to his law studies. The law books were full of information, and very heavy—the novels were quite devoid of anything instructive, and very light; and so he took the latter to correct the former.

He and Bella got on admirably. He took the water of the wishing-well with an appearance of faith and fervour which delighted Bella, and no doubt considerably influenced the wish that she uttered internally.

Then they wandered on, and toiled up the winding path to the pool, and sat down in the orchard to rest after their fatigues.

Bella posed herself gracefully upon the slant stem of an apple-tree which formed a sort of natural rustic seat. Marcus flung himself down on the grass at her feet. Then came a pause. Marcus began to single out particularly fine blades of grass, which he picked and ate like a very Nebuchadnezzar, while Bella dibbled little holes in the ground with the point of her parasol.

"You're not tired, I hope?" said Marcus at last, finding the silence was growing oppressive, and feeling it would be better to make a silly remark than none at all.

"Oh dear no!" said Bella gushingly. "I'm such a capital walker, you know. Oh, I'm used to it, because when we are alone" (here there came a little sigh) "papa and I wander about together a great deal."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes—very often."

Then came another pause, for somehow that subject was not suggestive of much.

"What a jolly place this is!" said Marcus at last—"so quaint, and out of the way, and that sort of thing."

"Oh, a charming spot!—so romantic, so beautiful, so poetical! It always reminds me of a beautiful poem about—dear me, what is it? Something about 'Go on, cold rivulet, to the sea.' I think it is Tennyson's or Tupper's—I forget which. But don't you love poetry?"

"Very much indeed. I envy the fellows who can write it immensely. I remember that song very well too; in fact, I know the air. But it makes me quite sad to think of it."

"Indeed! Oh, tell me what romantic interest has it for you? What touches you

when you think of it? Pray tell me!"

"Well, you see, there something about—

'No more by thee my steps shall stray,
For ever and for ever'——

or something of the sort; and, you know, this is most likely my last visit to Vale Farm. Your brother and I are due in town in a few days."

"Heigho! I shall be so sorry."

"Yes; Philip is a very model of attentive and affectionate brothers."

"Oh, of course I shall miss Philip very much. But"——

"But what, Miss Charlwood?"

"Well, he is so often away. You know we have not seen him here for an age. Still, of course, we shall miss him."

"And I'm sure he will be sorry to go. At least, if I may judge of his feelings by my own."

"Yours! Oh, I'm sure you must be tired of this humdrum country life."

"On the contrary, I am delighted with it. Ah me! I only wish I were some rustic Tityrus reposing under a beech."

"I don't remember him. Is he in *The Romance of the Forest?*"

"No. He was a lucky dog who lived some hundreds of years ago, far apart from the ordinary worries of human life—or so Virgil says."

The temptation to display his classical knowledge—though he knew Bella would not appreciate it—had betrayed Marcus into a statement which virtually checked the conversation for a few minutes. Another pause ensued, during which he devoured more grass and she prodded the unresisting earth into a pattern for a cullender. At last the lady took up the talk again, and this

time hovered a little nearer the subject they were both aiming at.

"We shall miss you very much when you are gone. Papa, I am sure, will be quite at a loss for an adviser when you have left us."

"And you, Miss Charlwood?"

"Oh, I shall be quite lonely again. No one to take me out for walks or tell me of the last new novels—nobody—heigho!"

"Miss Charlwood—Bella—I may call you Bella, may I not?" said Marcus, getting up gradually on one knee and leaning against the apple-tree, so as to get his arm in an easy position to clasp Bella's waist when necessary; "you will let me call you Bella?"

"Oh, such a friend of Philip's, and papa's, and all of us may call me so if he likes, you know, Mr. Lysaght."

"Yes, but don't speak to me in that formal way. Call me Marcus."

"Oh, I couldn't!"

"Yes, you could if you tried—try now!"

"It would sound so odd, so familiar. And you know I—I—oh, I couldn't!"

"Now do just this once!"

Here the arm crept round imperceptibly.

"Well—Marcus—there! I declare I didn't think I could find the courage."

"Ah, Bella, dearest Bella, if you would but always call me Marcus! If you would but add some endearing term to that poor name! Bella"—here his voice sank lower and the arm crept closer—"darling Bella, if you would only bestow on me the love"—

"Oh, hush! hush!" said Bella. "I must not hear more. You forget I am affianced to another. No, I must not hear a word more!"

And she put her fingers into her ears with a pretty affectation of deafness. But

she could hear what he said all the same!

"But, my own dear girl, you will not throw away your heart where you can surely feel no affection. You have been slighted and neglected by this Harding"——

"La! who ever told you about it?" broke in Bella.

Marcus was a little taken by surprise, but he fenced the question artfully, leading Bella to believe that Mrs. Harding had been his informant.

"The nasty artful thing," thought Bella, "to go and spitefully interfere, just because of a little harmless flirtation!" And Bella determined to avenge herself on Prue and Edward and all the family. She had been neglected by one and betrayed by another of them. So she turned to Marcus with a yielding grace.

"Oh, Marcus, what can I offer you but a

broken heart and a withered affection? I believed I loved, and though it is true I was mistaken"——.

"No! no! Bella dearest, you were deceived; you have been cruelly entrapped into an engagement where you did not give your heart. That is mine, I feel sure. Say you give it to me!"

"Alas, you will reproach me with that foolish, that fatal attachment."

"Never, dear girl, never! Tell me you will be mine, bestow on me the love which has never been awakened for another—you only mistook pity or friendship for the affection which the heart can only feel once in a lifetime: Say that you love me!"

"Oh, Marcus!"

He was kneeling close beside her now, with his arm round her waist, and his face so close to hers that her hair brushed his

cheek. He raised her hand to his lips, and she did not resist, for she knew from her novel-reading that that was a quite allowable expression of affection.

"Whisper to me at least that you do not hate me, Bella!"

"Hate you? Oh no!"—and she buried her blushing face on his shoulder—"I love you but too—too well. But this terrible engagement. I dare not, I must not release myself."

"But you are released. You have been neglected and forgotten: the tie no longer binds you."

"But I dare not"——

"Dare not? And yet you say you love me, Bella! Dare not! Would you dare to continue plighted to one who does not possess your heart?"

"Oh no, no! But it must not be yet. Do

not breathe a word of this to any living soul. I must still bear this terrible engagement a little longer. Let us keep our love a secret from all, and let us trust each other, Marcus. I plight my troth to you, and will be true to you, whatever may happen, and in spite of what others say. But conceal our engagement even from Philip for a while—until I tell you that I *can* feel myself released."

"But you are released now!"

"I dare not hope it, fondly as I dream it, Marcus. For suppose *he* shoud return and claim me! It has happened, for it did happen to *The Duke's Ward*, And I should have to keep my promise then. But you would still be true to me, and never wed another?"

Marcus thought to himself this was rather a hard bargain, but he only said, "I could

not long survive your loss, dearest Bella!" which so delighted that young lady that I verily believe she wished Edward might come back, it would be so romantic to have any one die for her!

"Oh, no, you would still live and love me in secret, and I should go through life with a broken heart wedded to another! It must be."

"Well, he may not turn up, after all," said Marcus, gliding unthinkingly into commonplace, "and even if he does, he would never exact the promise!"

"Let us not think of it, Marcus. We love each other truly, and whether united or divided our love will be the same. But you will not breathe a word of this solemn plighting to any breathing soul."

And Marcus vowed solemnly to breathe a word to no living soul; and then they ex-

changed rings and sealed the engagement with a kiss, and gave each other locks of hair, all of which was done according to the rules in such cases made and provided in sentimental novels.

Finally, when all this was over, they sauntered homeward arm-in-arm, conversing fondly of the past, the present, and the future.

At the gate which led from Vale Farm into the high road they came upon Philip, whose presence indeed they had become aware of, some time ere they saw him, by the odour of the choice Cabana he was smoking.

"Well, Bella, so you've shown Marcus your pet bit of picturesque? It's pretty, isn't it, old boy?"

"Very lovely indeed," said Marcus.

"Is it all right?" inquired Philip in dumb-

show, falling a little behind and catching his friend's eye.

"All right!" signalled the other, apparently quite forgetful of the solemn vow he had made a minute before to keep their loves a secret.

And the heart of Philip rejoiced.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE MIDST OF PERIL.

WHEN, after a pause of intense anxiety and excitement, Edward Harding, seated in the stern sheets of the first boat, gave the word to start, it seemed a positive relief to the men to dig their oars into the water and lift the boat along with such a vigorous first stroke as made all her timbers groan and creak. Then came a dreadful silence, save for the dash of the oars as they tugged away doggedly, the flats swaying heavily on the towlines and stopping the way sorely. Not a word was spoken in any

of the boats, but many of the women were praying as they clasped their children to their hearts.

Presently there was a shout and a shot on the right bank, where the forlorn hope had landed. Edward could distinguish Tom's voice as with a cheer the brave little handful dashed up the slope. The effect was certainly favourable for the fugitives in the boats, for only a dropping fire was maintained from that bank. Unfortunately the enemy had possession of the other bank, and though not quite to such advantage, the ground being lower, they were still able to pour a devastating fire into the crews as they came abreast of them.

It was a cruelly telling fire! Within two minutes from the first shot Edward's boat was almost unmanageable. First the bow oar was badly hit; then three and four were

so severely wounded that they could not pull another stroke; four, being hit in the arm, moreover, let fall his oar and it drifted away.

At such short range the effect was terrific; but as the men were evidently aiming at the boat's crew, the ladies, though sorely terrified, were not in any actual danger, still the bullets in some instances whistled too close to them to be pleasant, and the children were screaming in alarm, and unnerving their defenders.

And all this while the enemy, firing from behind trees and brushwood, were effectually concealed, and though one or two of the men in the boat fired, it was mere random chance-work. Edward ground his teeth savagely, and wished he were ashore among the wretches, instead of being in a boat running the gauntlet in this helpless

way. His boat in spite of all their efforts was drifting ashore, and the rudder no longer guided it. At last a shot severed the towline which connected it with the flat, and the boat-load of women and children, thus abandoned, floated a few yards down stream and grounded.

Edward had not had time to look round and see how the other boat was getting on, but he had a sort of wild hope that the fire had all centred on his boat, and that the others might escape, and so Mary might be saved. He could not see how they fared, for the smoke hung thickly over the river. When, however, the towline parted, and the flat ran aground, Edward saw there was but one thing to do.

"Jump ashore, lads, and try and drive the devils off—I'll swim down to the other boat, tell them to pull up, take the women

and children out of the grounded flat, and row away for dear life. We can keep these beggars at bay till they pass."

The men gave a glad cheer. They were tired of sitting as targets for the sepoys. So the boat was run ashore under cover of a volley, and then the men sprang to land, lowered their bayonets, and dashed at the concealed foe.

"Come on, boys," said the old sergeant, who took command of the landing-party; "let 'em have it hot!"

"Hurrah!" cried the men, and plunged into the thicket.

Edward dropped over the stern of the boat and struck out for the flat. As he did so he felt a warm tingling sensation in his shoulder, and a numbness in his right arm, which fell by his side powerless. He knew he was hit, but he had no time to ask him-

self if it was a severe wound or not. All he could do was to throw himself on his side, and paddle off to the flat with one hand. When he came alongside, he told the women that he was going down stream to bring up the other boat, and bade them hold themselves ready to scramble on board without delay.

Then he made for the other boat; but, alas! the condition of that and the second flat was worse than the others. He found that a severe volley had disabled the crew at the first fire—that they had drifted down stream and run aground, and that an attempt had been made to get them off, but that a second volley knocked several of the planks loose, and the water rushed in and swamped them, so that but for their being aground on the shallows they would all have been drowned.

Edward could have wept with vexation to see every hope of escape thus lost. But it was a time to act, not to lament. He remembered that he had promised Tom to watch over Mary as best he could, and now was the time. His own boats were hopelessly disabled, and so were the second boats, in which he had planned for the escape of the women, and now there was nothing to be done but to sell life dearly. The plans they had laid were defeated, and each must shift for himself individually. His responsibility, therefore, was at an end, so he determined to devote himself to the preservation of little Mary.

He found her sitting in the stern of the boat with a white terrified face, clasping her child in her arms. It seemed almost a hopeless attempt, but he felt it was their only chance.

"Here, Mary, give me the child." He took it from her and laid it on his shoulder. "Now jump overboard, and put your hands on my shoulders. Don't cling too close—don't be afraid. Now come, make haste!"

He had almost to drag her overboard, for she seemed quite stupefied. It was terrible work, for he was growing very weak from loss of blood, and he had to keep the child above water as best he could, and support Mary, while he prevented her clinging too closely. Nothing but the terrible danger which awaited them if they stayed behind could have nerved him—it was for life, and more than life, that he struggled.

Fortunately the smoke of the firing floated down stream on the face of the water, so that he was soon out of sight of the rebels, whose attention was, moreover, luckily for him, taken up with other things, for

not a single shot was aimed at him. Partly floating, partly swimming, they were back to the landing-place where the forlorn hope had left their boat. The boat was still there, near it a dead soldier lay prone. He had evidently been wounded, and had struggled back from the fight to the boat with some faint idea of escape, but had fallen dead ere he reached it. Edward took his musket and pouch, his own revolver, having, of course, got wet. He placed Mary and her child in the bottom of the boat, and standing up in the stern, sculled the boat along with a single oar. His right arm was so stiff now he could not use it at all.

He paddled slowly down to the scene of their rest in the early part of the day. He had noticed a ruined temple near there, and he thought they could find a place of con-

cealment in it. It would have been in vain to go back to Ungawallah, and this was as safe as any other place.

Faint and weak with loss of blood, he managed to get the boat ashore, and lifted Mary out of it with her child. That done, he drove the boat out into mid-stream again, for fear it should lead the enemy on their track, and then pushed through the jungle towards the ruins. It was weary work, for neither he nor Mary could do much more than crawl, but at last they reached the temple, and after carefully inspecting it found a sort of low cave or grotto beside a well, long since dried up. The entrance was almost hidden by a fallen pillar, and there were numbers of loose stones about, with which he could barricade this place of refuge against wild beasts, or those foes they feared almost worse—the natives. After he

had done this he flung himself down on the floor utterly exhausted. Mary and he had not exchanged a word all the time. She was seated in a corner, convulsively clasping her child to her bosom, and rocking it to and fro.

By this time the sounds of the firing had ceased. Edward trembled to think what that meant. He could not bear the silence. To distract his thoughts he examined the wound on his shoulder. It was only a flesh wound, but the muscle was so bruised it would be some time ere he would be able to use his arm again. He dressed the hurt as well as he could, and then set himself to clean his revolver and load it.

Mary was beginning to recover from the first stunning effects of her terror.

"Where is Tom, oh, where is Tom?" she kept moaning, until Edward feared her voice

might attract the notice of some straggler from the sepoy camp.

"Be still, and I'll try and see what I can do to find him, Mary. He is not far from here, but I must wait till it's dark, and it's some hours to night yet."

"Oh, bring Tom to me!" was all poor Mary could sigh. She was worn out with alarm, exertion, and want of food. Ted prevailed on her to take a few drops of the opiate the doctor had given him at starting, and then he made her up a rough bed of leaves and grass in the driest corner, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her sleeping quietly with her child nestling in her arms. Weary and long was the watch Edward kept by the mouth of the little grot. At times he heard a distant shout, and trembled lest it should be an approaching body of sepoys.

Slowly, hour by hour, the day drew on

towards night. A cool breeze sprang up bearing upon it at times the cry of the wild creatures beginning to stir in the jungle now that the heat of the day was done. Soon came the swift short twilight of the tropics, when the broad orb of day dipped below the horizon, and darkness sprang to its throne in the sky.

And now the cry of the wild creatures rang out wth terrible significance in the immediate neighbourhood of the ruins. The bark of the jackal, the long howl of the wolf, and at intervals the sullen roar of a tiger would be heard so close to hand that Edward was grateful that Mary was so sound asleep.

This new feature placed Edward in a new dilemma. He had been waiting for this hour to steal out to learn something of the fate of his companions, but now he did not

think it would be safe to leave Mary unguarded. He carefully inspected the cave, to make sure that there was no other opening save that by which he had entered, and was somewhat reassured to find there was not.

Then he determined to barricade the rough portal as strongly as he could, and venture out to the scene of the massacre. Having accomplished the fortification to his satisfaction, he loaded his revolver and musket, and, drawing his sword, stole down to the river bank.

All seemed quite still in the direction of the knoll, so he cautiously stepped into the stream and waded along close under the bank, as Tom had done in the morning. It was nervous work, but Ted had had some deerstalking in his younger days, and the experience stood him in good stead.

So quietly did he creep on that more than once he almost stumbled over some wild creature which had come down to drink, but which—as startled at meeting him as he was at meeting it—bounded off and was lost in the gloom. In this stealthy manner Ted had crept to the bend where the river turned to flow under the fatal hill. As he was straining his eyes to peer through the darkness and discover whether the place was deserted, he was astonished to see that the boat in which he had made his escape had been brought up stream again, and was moored just round the bend.

Before he had time to conjure what this meant, he heard a low voice speaking in Hindustanee, the sound seeming to come from over his head.

"Hush!" said the speaker, "keep quiet, sahib. I am a friend."

Edward recognised the voice of the friendly native who had been his guide to Ungawallah. Looking up, he saw him stretched along the branch of the tree to which the boat was moored.

"Have they moved off?" asked Edward.

"Not gone altogether; but they have left the banks of the river for their quarters at the village."

"Is there room for me up there?"

"No, sahib; you had better stop there, and I will come down and take you to a place of safety."

"No! I must go and search for my friend," said Edward.

"Why search for the dead? There can be none alive."

"Dead or alive I must find him."

The man slid down from the tree and stood by Edward's side.

"Who is this friend? If you will describe him I will go seek. If they find me they will only think I am after plunder; but you—they would shoot you."

Edward described Tom Martindale as well as he could to the man, but begged him to try and discover if any were left alive, so that they might try to rescue them.

The native told him to remain quite still under the shade of the bank, and not to stir even if he heard him challenged by the sepoys, as he would contrive to lead them off in another direction.

Edward felt very disinclined to sit still and trust all to the other; but the plan was evidently a wise one, so he submitted. He crouched down in the shade of the tamarisk, and watched the figure of the native glide away like a ghost into the darkness.

For a long time—it seemed an age—Ed-

ward waited and listened, but could hear nothing. Could the native have been captured, or had he lost heart and run away? He could bear it no longer, so he quietly crept up the bank, and, crouching down on hands and knees, crawled away in the direction of the hill, taking advantage, like a wise deerstalker, of all the inequalities of the ground and any shrubs or stones that could afford concealment. It was a terribly weary stalk, for his energies were not fired by the love of sport which sustains the deerstalker. He felt he was crawling forward in this way only to see, most probably, the mangled corpse of his oldest and dearest friend.

Before long he came upon two or three dead bodies, and, by the light of the stars, could make out from their accoutrements that they belonged to the forlorn hope.

Presently he saw a figure gliding towards him rapidly. As it came nearer he saw it was his native friend, so he gave a low whistle to attract his attention.

"There are two men badly wounded, but alive, by that clump of palms. You can rise and walk secure, for I have been to the top of the hill, and they are encamped beyond, and have not sentries on guard."

With a great sigh of relief Edward sprang to his feet and hurried to the palms. He found a private soldier and one of the civilians badly wounded. They had been left for dead by the sepoys, but the cold night air had revived them. The soldier believed he could walk with some support. The civilian had been shot in the ankle. Edward and the native made a rude litter with a couple of muskets, and raised the young fellow on it, the soldier staggering after

them, leaning on the Hindoo's shoulder. They made but slow progress, however, and had to halt frequently. As they passed a patch of native grass they heard a voice faintly hailing them, and turned aside to search for its owner.

Imagine Edward's delight when he found it was Tom Martindale.

Tom had been shot in the thigh at the first discharge, but as the men drove the mutineers back with the suddenness of their attack, he managed to crawl away into the jungle, as had done two or three others who had been badly wounded—so badly that they had all died, and Tom declared he should have died, too, soon, if they had not come.

"And Mary?" asked Tom, grasping Edward's hand.

"Safe, Tom!"

"Thank God for that! I shall live now."

By slow degrees the little party crawled down to the river-side, and the wounded were safely deposited in the boat, and then Tom and the friendly native ran back to the scene of the conflict to gather a few shot-pouches and a musket or two. With these they returned as quickly as they could, and before long the little boat was shooting down stream again.

Ted explained to the native where his place of concealment was, and he agreed that it was as good as any other, though he feared the sepoys would be sure to scour all the country, even if the villagers did not turn out to hunt fugitives for the sake of plunder.

They got their wounded into the grotto without much difficulty, and, having collected leaves for couches, set themselves to

dressing their wounds. The young civilian was sinking fast, and they felt that without the aid of a surgeon his life could not be saved. The soldier and Tom Martindale, however, promised to amend under the care of the native, who dressed their hurts with a few simples.

This done, Edward held a council of war. His garrison consisted of two available men besides himself. Mary might be relied on to load, and perhaps the civilian might be of some service in that way. But the small fort was in a bad state of defence and absolutely without provisions. This last deficiency, however, the native promised to supply. He could bring them some rice and fruit before morning, enough to support them for a few days, while he made his way to Kholaghur to bring down the troops to their rescue.

It was nearly daybreak ere the provisions were all brought and stowed away, and then the Hindoo stole quietly out of the grot, and going down to the river unmoored his boat and pulled up stream.

Imagine the delight of poor Mary when the straggling rays of light pouring into the little den made her open her eyes and she saw Tom sitting beside her, looking pale and ill to be sure, but still alive.

So hemmed in, surrounded by foes, and crowded into a dark, damp little cell, the survivors of the Ungawallah garrison were once more in a state of siege ; but they kept up a brave heart, and trusted in the speedy approach of their deliverers.

And the deliverers were coming, for as soon as the news reached Kholaghur succours were sent out. But in the meantime the sepoys had discovered that there were

fugitives concealed somewhere in the neighbourhood, and were scouring the country in search of them.

CHAPTER V.

PRUE'S PEN AT WORK AGAIN.

WHEN at last Prue became conscious that it was vain to struggle against fate, in the shape of Marcus Lysaght, she settled down to her old pursuits again.

Her last blow, struck for the absent Ted, was a long lecture she read Bella after Marcus and her brother had left Bremning Minor. But, to Prue's astonishment, Bella turned round on her and asked her how she, a clergyman's wife, dared counsel her to disobey her father. This was quite a new tack for the romantic Bella to sail on, nor

was this all. She actually rang the bell and sent the servant for "dear papa," and when "dear papa" heard what Prue had been saying to Bella, he fired up in style, and was as rude as he could be (which was something considerable), and wound up by forbidding Prue the house.

Prue returned home and took up her long-neglected pen and vowed to herself that she would abjure the world and turn blue-stocking. So she wrote to Pounceby to see what he would do about her novel, but received a letter from a stranger who informed her that Pounceby was wound up, that the Woman's Home was sold, and the new proprietors did not see their way to publishing *Cyril Markham; or, Gold and Goodness.* That very veracious history had been laid aside in an unfinished state, and so Prue had to wade all through her manu-

script in order to recover the thread of her plot, which was not very encouraging work. But she persevered, and having completed it sent it up to London to Mr. Mudsill, an enterprising gentleman, who had begun as a printer, had taken a publisher's stock and business for a debt for printing, and who, by dint of smartness and an easy, not to say pachydermatous, conscience, was making a fairish trade, that would have been a prosperous one if he had not displayed the same ability for spending as for making money.

He wrote in high terms of praise of her novel, and assured her that he was charmed at meeting with a second *Jane Eyre*. Little Prue, who had not read *Jane Eyre*, but had somehow picked up a notion from some fogey review that it was not a feminine book, was not altogether flattered at this. But she was very much delighted when Mr.

Mudsill assured her that he should be happy to publish the book at their own risk and give her two-thirds of the profits.

So Prue agreed to let him have the novel on those advantageous terms, and, in accordance with his advice, immediately set to work to write another. "He was prepared, on the same terms, to publish any number of works from her pen, if at all up to the average of *Cyril Markham*," said he.

Cyril Markham accordingly made his appearance, with a loud flourish of trumpets from one or two papers, which Prue read with great pride and trembling. Alas! she little knew the real value of the critiques, or the cause of their laudations. How could she tell that the sub-editor of the *Penny Popgun* always spoke well of books *he* got to review, in order to get more books from the publishers?—for even novels will fetch

a price in Bookseller's Row if they have not been cut by the reviewer! Similarly she was ignorant that Mudsill and the proprietor of the *Rational Review* were friends, and that she owed her most favourable notice to the mistake of its writer, who thought she was the wife of a gentleman of the name of Harding from whom he hoped to elicit a loan in consideration of the critique!

Of course *Cyril Markham* was deservedly pitched into by many independent journals; but Mudsill did not send her copies of them, and newspapers—especially literary journals—were as rare at Bremning Minor as seal-skin waistcoats are in Central Africa.

Prudence, who felt she had now set in for a literary character, used to study her reviews attentively—on the sly—in the hope of becoming *au fait* in everything affecting the republic of letters. But she was not

much wiser for her reading. She found that ever and anon new and promising stars were rising above the horizon, but that after shining for a space they disappointed the expectations which had been formed of them.

Meanwhile she scribbled away at every leisure minute, working hard to keep all her household work in hand, and yet get on with her literary labours. It was a most fearful drudgery, but she did not mind. She was looking forward to the day when she should be a successful novelist. She was longing for the hour when she might reveal herself to James as "the celebrated author of *Cyril Markham*, etc," with a large balance at her banker's.

So *Cyril Markham* was succeeded by *Gervase's Guerdon: A Tale of the Middle Ages.* Then followed *Rank and Ruin*, suc-

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ceeded by *A Woman's Life*, and *The House among the Heather*. These novels were all brought out one after the other as fast as Prue wrote them, and they were all, if Mr. Mudsill could be believed, very great successes, and they must certainly have been made to pay somehow, for the firm did not hesitate once as to the chance of another novel from the same hand proving profitable.

The real truth is that Mudsill had reduced novel-publishing to a science. He knew exactly how many copies to print, and how much to lay out on them. There is a certain steady demand for trash in three volumes which is sure to repay those who supply the article, always provided they can produce the materials for the supply pretty cheap. It may not appear, at first sight, that the offer to pay Prue two-thirds of the

profits (after taking all the risk and cost of production themselves) was a very cheap way of procuring material; but it was, as you will perceive on a closer examination of the system. Mudsill had made up his mind that the balance-sheet should show (after printing, publishing, and advertising expenses) exactly nothing as the profit, and that was a sum of which it was as easy to give two-thirds as one—and then it looked generous.

Of course, however, these balances were never struck unless called for, and then their result always took Mudsill quite aback. So in the interim he kept assuring Mrs. Harding of the great and deserved success her novel was achieving, and Mrs. Harding was totting up imaginary two-thirds of immense sums, unheard of (at all events, in those days) in the annals of literary profits.

At last a time came when James and Prue were a little pressed for money, so she wrote for a cheque on account of *Cyril Markham.* For the first time since they had begun their correspondence Mr. Mudsill omitted to take immediate notice of her letter. She wrote again. No answer still. So then she dropped him a little peppery line, to which he responded, in a tone of injury that accounts could not be made out in a day, and that as soon as he knew how the balance on *C. M.* stood he would let her know.

The temporary pressure passed away, and Prue had almost forgotten the application when she got a most extraordinarily complicated sheet which professed to be a statement of *Cyril Markham's* affairs. It was elaborate and unintelligible, except on one point, and that was that there was no

profit at all on that very successful novel!

Prue was horrified. She invented an excuse for a short visit to town, and within a few days presented herself at her publishers.

Mr. Mudsill was civil to a degree—slimily polite. It was with great difficulty that Prue could get him to discuss the very matter that had brought her to town. He fenced and evaded the question as much as possible ; but Prue was determined to bring him to an account, and so at last he found it would be better to come to the point.

Accordingly he fetched out all sorts of books in which the transactions with regard to Prue's novels were entered. Then he gave a long and complicated account of the system of thirteen to the dozen, and so much off for subscription, and so much off for the great circulating libraries. He went into the question of presentation copies for

the press, and, in fact, poured the whole publishing business on Prue's devoted head.

In some cases candour is the best concealment. This frank avowal of all the mysteries of the trade enabled him to conceal some little facts which would have told a different story. For, but for the dust thus thrown in her eyes, Prue even would have seen that if the whole edition of a work is sold out there must be some profit, if it has been produced on simple business-like principles.

Prue did not win much by her interview. She left in a still more muddled state as to balance-sheets, expenses of publishing, and the ruinous system of discounts to the trade. So she returned to Bremning Minor in a confused and unsatisfactory state of mind, determining not to send Mr. Mudsill the new novel she had just finished until she

received intelligible accounts of all she had already published. She wrote to that effect to him, but received no answer.

It was some months after her London trip that she received a formal legal letter, stating that Mr. M. had parted with the business to Mr. Chose. Then she learnt that he had called together his creditors, amongst whom, oddly enough, there were few, if any, of the authors, and there was a composition, and Mr. Mudsill transferred his business ability and integrity to the task of promoting bubble companies, and when last heard of had disappeared with the wife of one man, and the wealth of several others.

Prue wrote to Mr. Chose about her novels, and he referred her to the accountants, who were trying to make clear accounts of the affairs of the late business. And these accountants sent her balance-

sheets which were so beautifully balanced that there were no profits and no losses in any one case.

Then Prue saw that she had been cheated, and she was not particularly surprised, on writing to Mr. Chose and proposing to continue her business relations with him, to receive his answer to say that he should be happy to publish for her on commission, but that he did not feel justified in embarking in any speculation in her novels.

But Prue was not to be disheartened. She saw an advertisement in one of the papers, offering a reward for a prize tale for a new cheap publication, and she sent in two stories. One of these she was paid for. It was the prize story, and she got for it about half of what she ought to have received, at something ridiculously low per column, when it appeared. The other was mislaid,

or never reached the advertiser. At any rate, it was lost, until one day, many years after, Prue by chance met with it in a half-penny weekly, figuring under an altered title.

The prize story, however, got her another job of the same sort. It would have got her several if the ingenious publisher of the story had forwarded to her the letters addressed to her at the office of the paper. But he was too old a hand to do that. It was by the merest chance (probably by bribing some understrapper at the publishing office) that her second employer found her out. This brought a little grist to the mill. Enough to buy shoes for Prue the Second, and to pay for the washing of the Rev. James's surplice, which the parish would only undertake to wash once a year, and which it was loth to see washed oftener than that, even though it did not pay for

the extravagance, for fear of wearing it out.

Prue also tried the magazines, and got snubbed and rejected. She again went the round of the novel publishers, and with no better success than before. Finally she tried to get some translating to do, but that was of no avail. And then she gave up literature from sheer exhaustion, not from any want of pluck.

Her next attempt was to turn an honest penny by answering an advertisement offering to teach a ladylike employment of an artistic character—"no knowledge of drawing required—and employment given when proficient." This turned out to be the colouring of photographs, and she had to buy materials and pay for lessons (to be given by letter), and when she could do it well, was to be paid about a penny an hour for her work.

And all this time James knew nothing of his wife's struggles to earn an honest penny. And there came a little sister for Prue the second, and she was christened Mary. "Another mouth to feed," thought Prue, "and all my schemes for adding something to the store are failing." And she grew very desponding for awhile, for she felt she was struggling in vain—as vainly as she had fought to keep Marcus Lysaght from stealing away the charge that Edward had given her when he went away to India.

Bella and Marcus Lysaght were married during Prue's literary career. They were married at Bremning Minor, but James did not perform the ceremony. It was a very grand wedding, and there was a grand feast for the village people, who duly made beasts of themselves on bad cider in honour of the occasion, and were maudlinly loyal to "the

Squoire an' vam'ly," like the poor feudal vassals they were. There was plenty to eat and drink for them all for this one day, a band on the Manor-house lawn for them to dance to, and there were fireworks at night. And then, having done their duty like supers on a stage at pantomime time; having waved their goblets and shouted long life to the bride, they were allowed to subside into squalor and poverty. They filled up the stage, and were very necessary adjuncts to the wedding, but, that over, the Squire didn't care to set eyes on them again. Let them go back to their tumble-down hovels, their bad drainage, their worse ventilation, and their still worse fare.

The bride and bridegroom went to Killarney for their honeymoon. Bella was delighted with that romantic spot, but it was the end of romance for her. Marcus soon

tired talking of novels, and set about forming her character. He succeeded in making her quite indifferent to him, and devoted to society and its gaieties. He succeeded in making her despise her relations as boors and her birthplace as a land of savages—in short, he made a fashionable woman of the world of her. Whether she was more agreeable in that character than as a silly, sentimental girl I cannot say, but I suppose he thought so.

As for Philip, he netted his two hundred a year, and painted the lily and gilded the refined gold in his luxurious chambers. Of course he held his head much higher now, having the Hon. Marcus Lysaght, the future Earl of Mountgarret, for his brother-in-law. Marcus got him Parliamentry practice, too, which was very easy and exceedingly lucrative. Besides which advan-

tages, derived from having a budding earl for a brother-in-law, Philip contrived to pick up a treasurership to a flourishing company, so that he was rolling in clover. He rode a splendid horse in the Park now, and had a cab and a mail phaeton, which, however, might have been more fittingly styled a female phaeton, since it was in that vehicle that the fair Amélie of the opera condescended (in a pink bonnet and lemon gloves) to allow him to drive her to Richmond or Greenwich.

And luckily for Philip, the old Squire was beginning to break down. For, if truth must out, as Philip prospered Philip got idle, and there were not so many briefs left at Mr. Charlwood's chambers as there used to be in his industrious days. But no matter! wasn't he brother-in-law of Earl Mountgarret, and in receipt of a good allowance,

and in Parliamentary practice, and treasurer to a flourishing company? Yes! and hadn't he any amount of credit, too, which is as good as money any day, or very nearly so.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND BATTLE OF BREMNING MINOR.

FOR all the good that Bella personally had done in Bremning Minor one might have supposed she would be little missed after her marriage. But one would have supposed wrongly, as is generally the case with the wisest of suppositions. Although Bella had never taken an active part in the promotion of the village's welfare, her passive presence had been beneficial; as was discovered very soon after her departure.

The fact is that she had formed a sort of safety-valve for the Squire. That amiable

gentleman was subject to frequently-recurrent fits of ill-temper, which while he had Bella with him passed off in little grumbles at her, like threatening thunder, but which, when she was gone, and there was no conductor to carry off the electricity, accumulated and broke out in violent tempests. He worked himself into the most shocking furies, and stalked out into the village full of wrath, and bent upon mischief. Woe betide the luckless urchin who was caught pelting down horse-chestnuts then! Woe betide the susceptible hedger or ditcher who had knocked off work for a minute to have a chat with Patty with the milk-pails! Woe betide the bird-boy who had fallen asleep in the sun, or the wayfarer who wandered from the footpath across the fields! Yea, woe betide the ox, or the sheep, or the pig that had strayed, the geese that had trespassed,

or the fowls that had flown over the garden-walls when Squire Charlwood, in these days of his solitude, sallied out with the storm-cloud on his brow!

But he was not content with executing these raids without deliberation. Sitting in his lonely mansion—it was lonely indeed, for the servants, including even the old housekeeper, kept out of his way as much as possible—devouring his own bitter heart in silence and savageness of spirit; he framed all sorts of cunning cruelties and artful acts of hostility to his neighbours. I think it probable—I hope, indeed—that at first these schemes were the mere passing fancies of an angry mind, driven half mad by isolation, like a rat bricked into its hole. But if so, they grew in power over the old man in time, and he began to carry out his bad conceptions. James Harding was, of course,

certain to be one of the earliest sufferers by the old man's hostility.

The Squire had a good deal of experience of that miniature world a country village. He knew exactly the people he had to deal with, and the feelings on which he might count. And he knew his own power as Squire, and the position of James as parish priest.

There was one class in the parish which he knew thoroughly—the farmers. It was through the farmers that he saw his way to annoying James.

Now there were in Bremning a few very honest fine fellows among the farmers. But they were the least influential of the class—often the least prosperous. The majority were men of the good old agricultural school; men who locked up their corn, with the people starving around them, until the

price of wheat rose to something tremendous; men who railed at weather and lamented bad harvests, and yet were anything but grateful for a good one, because they thought prices would go down.

The Bremning farmers were a charming set of men. They had long opposed the opening of the village school on the ground that the poor people ought not to know too much, and could do the work they (the farmers) wanted of them without any "book-larning," as they called it. They with still firmer obstinacy set their faces against a proposed restoration of the church, because the big loose-box pews would have been removed, and they could not have slept comfortably through the service and sermon. So that altogether these were not the men on whom James could count for much support, or even friendly feeling, while he

and the Squire were not on good terms.

For the Squire they had a sort of uncouth feudal regard, and it was strengthened by the ties of self-interest. He was their landlord, and not only their landlord, but the landlord of their labourers. It was wise to keep on good terms with him, because he could help them to grind the faces of their poor—and he did.

There were certain labourers' cottages in Bremning, and they belonged to the Squire. If the labourers of the Bremning farmers were not fortunate enough to rent one of these, or a part of one, they had many a long mile to trudge from the neighbouring village to their daily work at early dawn. These cottages the Squire let in a lump to the farmers, who formed a sort of society for the purpose, and sublet them to their workmen. And if the workmen declined to

labour for the handsome sum of seven shillings a week (liable to deductions for cider and inferior corn supplied at a little more than its intrinsic worth) they had to trudge from the next village every morning, for there was no hovel in all Bremning that would be let to them. Of course they might go and work somewhere else, provided the law of settlement did not chain them down to one spot, like tethered beasts of the field. Any one who knows anything about the English agricultural labourer will not expect there was a great emigration of toilers from Bremning.

You see there was a tie of interest, a breeches-pocket regard, existing between the farmers and the Squire. They were his, heart and soul, an expression which I may use, for they must have had hearts and souls,

these farmers, although they did give so little evidence of their possession.

As long, then, as there was apparent peace between the Squire and the parson, the farmers, though they did not love the latter, at all events concealed their dislike and hatred. But when it was known in the parish that Mr. Charlwood and James had had a difference, their conduct towards the latter underwent a considerable change. To be sure, they continued to go to church, mechanically, as they went to market. But there was no recognition for the clergyman as he passed any chance knot of talkers that had collected in the churchyard; if he met any of them in the village, there was no courteous converse, no "Fine day, sir!" or "Morning, sir, and how be your good lady?"

This was bad enough, but by-and-by the

Squire very quietly incited the farmers to covert acts of opposition. He took opportunities of letting fall little hints as to steps the farmers might take in the vestry in any chance conversation he had with them. The suggestion would in time dawn on the intelligence of the agriculturist, who would be under the impression that it was an idea of his own, and be proud of it accordingly. In this way there grew to be a strong opposition to James in the vestry. It showed itself first of all by numerous acts of petty annoyance—by a stolid opposition and a vulgar insolence of language. But before long it took a more active form. It culminated in a refusal to vote a church-rate.

The Squire chuckled over the success of his mischief. He felt that all this was his doing, and that James knew it was, too. And he therefore took a spiteful delight

in watching James's struggle with his difficulties in the parish.

I need hardly tell you that James was no longer almoner for the Manor-house. He did his best not to allow the withdrawal of the Squire's contributions to be felt by the poor objects of charity, but it was a drain on his means which he could ill afford. And now when the church-rate was stopped, too, the call was too heavy for him.

The village doctor, who spoke to James rather on the sly, and when he thought the Squire was not looking, for fear of losing the Manor-house practice, asked him why he did not try what the law would do to help him. But James shook his head. It was but a very uncertain aid, and he was, moreover, especially anxious to avoid any course that could make the church unpopular by an appearance of avarice or tyranny. It was too

high and holy, he thought, to want the support of a bailiff and a distraint, but even if it did need it, he would rather not see the arm of the law stretched out, and the interest of the clergyman fighting with that of his people. This was a chivalrous and perhaps sentimental view of the question, for which reasons the farmers, not being chivalrous or sentimental, did not seem to appreciate it except as a triumph for themselves. But this even was not the only evil that the Squire's aversion wrought.

The poor of the village were so crushed down that they had learnt to be hypocrites. They magnified their real ills, and they exaggerated their real feelings; they were driven to do so to earn a crust or an alms. And Hypocrisy brought with it other evil spirits worse than itself, and they took possession of the ill-tutored, miserable wretches.

And one of the evil spirits was Ingratitude, and another Greed. So the poor, finding James's charity, despite his struggles, a little narrowed, forgot all his kindness to them, and murmured because there was stint. And furthermore, in a sort of vague idea that there was some hope for them to benefit by siding with the stronger—whereas there was not the faintest in the world—they began to imitate the farmers, clumsily, and to side, as it were, with the Manor-house against the parsonage.

This was very horrible, was it not? So ungrateful! So mean! So treacherous! Exactly; it was all this, but you see these poor, crushed, crawling creatures had been brought up in the bad school of necessity. They had learnt to fawn, and to cringe, and to grovel at the feet of their benefactors, and in that humiliation the sense of grati-

tude somehow was lost. Yes! It was horrible indeed in these ignorant wretches. But then, thank goodness, meanness, treachery, and ingratitude are confined solely to these miserable animals—people who have had better opportunities, and are placed in more fortunate circumstances, never display those vices!

James was sorely tried by this state of things in his parish. He was a very brave and earnest man, but this battling against overpowering odds took the spirit out of him—and small wonder! You may be as bold and determined as you choose, but it is vain to fling yourself against a cliff, and try to beat it down with your bare fists. You may try it for a time, but you must at last sink down exhausted, and bleeding, and despairing.

Despair was getting hold of James. His

sermons were appeals most piteous to listen to, but he pleaded in vain. Only the grey-headed Squire, sitting in the high crimson pew with the curtains drawn close around, listened to or cared for the discourse. To him it was pleasant enough as a proof of his wicked success.

So James began to move moodily about his parish, doing his duty honestly and righteously, but without the old delight and eagerness. He tried to struggle with his increasing depression, but to no purpose. He felt too plainly that henceforth there was no sun to shine upon his labours, no harvest to reap, no love to win, no sympathy to rely on. It was a dull, dark waste to toil through, not because of the labour to be done—that he did not shrink from—but because the labour would be fruitless. He knew thoroughly that the minister who has

not the hearts and sympathies of his flock is but as the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal. It may not be the minister's fault that he fails to enlist the feelings of his people, but the punishment falls on him.

James Harding felt this acutely, and it flung a gloom over his life, so that the once happy home even—the place where a man should find shelter and sunlight in his worst of troubles—was darkened by this sorrow.

James never complained. He did not murmur, though at times he sighed. He never revealed, even to his wife, how deeply he was wounded by this failure. But Prue's loving eyes were quick enough to see the trouble and divine its cause. And after that there was but one thing she could do—she must strive to remedy it.

Thanks to Prue's care and kindness, Martha Ogleby had come at last to be a toler-

ably prudent and trustworthy nurse. To be sure she still would wonder in a stolid and apathetic way when anything very new and quite unaccounted for in her experience of the laundry and nursery turned up; but on the whole she was so devoted to the children, that her mere instincts kept her straight, and Prue felt the children were safe with her. There was only one heresy that she seemed likely to instil into the little folk's mind, and that was a very harmless one—nothing more serious, in fact, than garblings and alterations of the old-established fairy tales and nursery legends. From an antiquarian point of view it was highly nefarious to tamper with the old traditions, but Prue was not an antiquarian, and was not horrified, although Martha would insist that Cinderella's mother was a washerwoman, and her father a baron; that The Sleeping Beauty

was overtaken by slumber because she wounded her hand with the copper-stick; that—

> "This little pig went to market,
> And this little pig stayed at home,
> And this little pig had a basket,
> And this little pig had none,
> And this litte pig cried 'Week, week, week!
> I'm going to carry the washing home.'"

also, that Little Red Riding-Hood's grandmother was bedridden in consequence of her legs having given out at the washtub. All these harmless misquotations, arising from her having had soap-suds in her eyes in her earliest views of life, Martha made in perfect good faith and without any intention of giving undue importance to her mother's profession.

Prue, therefore, could leave the children in her charge without anxiety while she set herself to curate's work, to try and win back

the affection and sympathy of the people of Bremning Minor.

I need hardly say that the farmers' wives were hardly the sort of people among whom Prue had been in the habit of selecting her intimate friends. But she set to work now to try and establish the most friendly relations with them. It was uphill and difficult work, for the she-agriculturists had a very stiff pride of their own, and yet felt that Prue was condescending in seeking them. So at first there was a good deal of ice to be broken, but Prue's kind smile did something considerable towards thawing it, and after a hard struggle she succeeded in gathering about her a little circle of farmers' wives. They were jealous of each other, and it was not always easy to keep peace among them, but Prue succeeded to a marvel. It was quite a new life for these wo-

men, and a very pleasant one to occupy the intervals of their domestic labours, for with all their pride they worked like servants in their own homes. Then Prue craftily turned her organisation to use, and made a sort of Dorcas society of it. She managed, too, by good generalship to interest some of her new friends in the poor. I'm afraid a part (I won't say how large) of that interest originated in the pleasure it gave "Mrs. Turmutts" or "Farmer Wutts's good lady" to be seen doing the Lady Bountiful in such genteel company. But the result, as far as the benefit to the poor was concerned, was just as good, and it made the poor folk grateful to Prue for awakening such an interest in them.

But this was not all that this sagacious, not to say crafty, woman was aiming at. She knew that the women to a great extent in-

fluenced their husbands on matters not purely of an agricultural and business nature. Before long the Squire found that there was a growing feeling in favour of the parson in the vestry. A little party sprang up which supported him, and those who had always been in his favour, but felt themselves too weak to do good, and had been too cowardly to speak out, at once sided with it, and the opposition was not very earnest, for those who cared least for James had received orders from their home governments to treat him well for the sake of his wife.

Eventually the Squire, who hated to be crossed, was so put out by this alteration of opinion that he snubbed some of his best friends in the vestry, and then they did from wounded pride what they would not do for justice—they took James's part, so the Squire withdrew from parochial matters altogether,

and things went on smoothly—at least as smoothly as they could be expected to go on between James, who had his views of his duty towards his neighbour, and the farmers, who had theirs of their duty towards themselves.

In this way was fought the second battle of Bremning Minor, and in this one Prue came off victorious.

James Harding thoroughly appreciated his brave little wife's generalship. She had overcome difficulties which he had found insurmountable; she had infused new life and strength into him; she had achieved a great conquest, and yet there she was back again by the fireside in her neat little grey gown and her black silk apron nursing her children, and looking as if she had never stirred out of the ingle-nook—at all events, showing no sign of the pride of victory, no hint that

she had succeeded where he had failed. She was still the same confiding, affectionate little woman, looking up admiringly to her husband; and that, let me tell you, was a source of great comfort to James. She might very fairly have assumed an air of superiority, he felt, but their positions would have been at once altered. Now the happy current of their lives flowed on as calmly and musically as ever.

There was only one trouble that darkened their horizon now: they were very poor, and had many calls upon their purse, and they had children to bring up. Prue had been well brought up in one sense: she had been taught all the elegant accomplishments, but of the solid and useful portion of education had received but a small smattering. She had, however, good shrewd sense enough to have picked up as expe-

rience grew all that was absolutely necessary. Now she felt she must put herself to school again for the sake of her children.

So James one day came into the nursery, unobserved, because Martha was chanting in a high and not particularly musical key how when

> "The maid was in the garden
> Hanging out her clothes,
> There came a little blackbird
> And pecked off her nose."

and he found Prue hard at work, with a lot of very dry and dull school-books before her.

"Why, what's all this, Prue? Are you going to open a school for young ladies?"

Prue gave a start, and blushed. But she said, "Yes, she was."

"And who are your first pupils to be, madam?"

"Sir, they are at present in Martha's

charge—there they are! Do you know them, or shall I formally introduce them? The taller of the two is Miss Harding—Miss Prudence Harding, the daughter of a poor clergyman. The other, with the pink toes, and three-parts of her right fist in her mouth, is Miss Mary Harding, sister of Miss Prudence, also the daughter of a poor clergyman, who cannot afford a governess for them, so I am going to undertake their education for nothing a year and no extras. But as unfortunately my own small stock of learning has got a little rusty for want of use, I am furbishing it up a bit."

"You're a model wife, Prue!" said James, raising her hand reverently to his lips.

"I hope I try to do my duty," she answered with a sweet smile; "but if you want a model, take Miss Mary yonder. Did you

ever see such beautifully mottled arms and legs? And there are toes! I'm quite sure you never saw such queer little crumpled, crinkled toes, papa. And oh those fingers, that always will get into baby's mouth, after feeble and loitering attempts to get into her eyes! I don't know what we shall do with them; put them in bags, I think. Martha must really keep those naughty fingers out of baby's mouth, mustn't she, papa?"

Martha grins, and says "Aw!" but does not distinctly promise to interfere so far with baby's liberty. In strict confidence I will tell you that I think she encourages that small person in the reprehensible habit of sticking as many of her fingers as she can into her mouth, for the result of the amusement is that the tips of the fingers become flabby and wrinkled, as if they had been doing a long spell of duty at the washtub,

and I verily believe Martha considers this combination of the two most important things in the world—washing and a baby—to be a triumphant success, and one of the most beautiful things humanity has ever been blessed with the opportunity of seeing.

As for little Prue the second, she has so advanced in stature, strength, and knowledge since we first made her acquaintance that she can stagger towards her mamma, hang on by her gown, point at her sister, and say very gravely, with large eager eyes, "Baba —pingers—mouse!"

CHAPTER VII.

TOM'S FIRST TIGER.

FOR two weary days and nights the fugitives kept watch and ward in their little grotto by the ruins. Slowly the hot dawn widened into the full blaze of tropical midday, and on through the fiery noon, till the long shadows crept round, pointing eastward, and the sultry orb sank down the cloudless west. Slowly the night darkened overhead as the stars glittered out, mocked by the fireflies that swarmed from the jungle. Slowly the long hours of night wasted, while the voices of the wild creatures

of the forest echoed through the gloom, now far away, now close at hand. Slowly the eastern sky melted into a trembling grey, as the beasts, hushing their fierce cries, slunk away to their dens, and the great sun sprang up like a giant refreshed.

Poor Mary, lulling her child in her arms, dreaded the long watches of the night, pressing her baby more closely to her breast whenever the howl of some ravenous beast rang out closer than ordinary to the ruins. But then the men dreaded the day more, when the mutineers, more ferocious than the beasts of prey, ranged the neighbourhood. Again and again parties of stragglers passed close to the place of their concealment, and Ted and the others of the little garrison grasped their weapons with a quiet firm grip, prepared to sell their lives dearly. But the voices died out, and the footsteps

sank into silence, and there was a great sigh of relief.

All this time the want of proper surgical care and the confinement in such a small damp prison of a place did not help Tom Martindale to get better of his wound; nor was the soldier much improved in strength, though, being more used to roughing it than Tom, he bore up better.

As for the young civilian, he was sinking hourly. On the morning of the second day he was so terribly exhausted that he begged them to lay him in the corner of the grotto, out of the sight of Mary, and let him die in peace. But Mary overheard him, and insisted on sitting by him and tending him.

He was the only son of a widow. His father had been in the navy, but was drowned before the boy was ten years old. The bereaved mother had retired to Ireland, her

native country, to bring up her boy as she best could with the limited means she possessed. An old admiral, who had been an intimate friend of her father's, got the lad a nomination for the Indian Civil Service, and the gallant young fellow had studied day and night to fit himself for his examination. He had been out but a few years, and was returning home on leave when the mutiny broke out.

Poor fellow! he faced death as bravely as he had faced the foe, but when he spoke of his mother there came a spasm of sharp anguish over his face: he would have given worlds only to live long enough just to see her once more. But it was not to be. By noon on the second day the pain had passed away. It passed away never to return, for its cessation was a sign that mortification had begun.

He dictated a few lines to his mother, which Ted wrote down in his pocket-book, crying like a child—or a strong, kindly man—as he did so. It would seem almost a sacrilege to copy those words, so my readers must let me fold up the tiny scrap of paper which is to be such a sad legacy—such a treasured, never-dying recollection and memento of her lost son to the poor mother miles away across the sea.

As the shades of evening came on without, the shades of death gathered within the little refuge. Mortification spread upwards—it rose like a tide of the great sea of oblivion, inch by inch creeping up to the poor, feeble, fluttering heart.

And now the cold wave touched the vital centre, and the pulse was stopped.

Mary noticed the change in his face, and bent over him. His mind had wandered far

away, and as the womanly figure hung over him in the dim light he fancied his mother was by him.

"Have you come at last, mother dear?" he whispered faintly. "I have been lying awake to see you—I couldn't get to sleep. But I shall sleep now. Good night; God bless you!" And then he slept.

It was necessary, for the sake of the survivors, that the poor fellow's corpse should not remain long in the grotto. A speedy burial of the dead is the safety of the living in India.

It was agreed that the grave would be safest dug in the little hollow close by where the mouth of the dried-up well was. Edward and the soldier turned up the earth with their bayonets, while Tom kept watch to warn them of any approaching footsteps. It was slow work, for their tools were but

poor substitutes for mattock and pickaxe, and they had to work as quietly as possible. It was night before they had finished their task. They wrapped the poor fellow in the soldier's grey greatcoat, and laid him down in the shallow and hasty grave, over which they recited what they could recall of the burial service. Then they shovelled the earth in again, replaced the sods, and piled a rough cairn of stones above the grave as a rude monument to the dead. When this melancholy task was over they crept back into their place of shelter and barricaded themselves in again.

Tom was worn and weak with his wound, and Ted and the soldier were wearied with their long and harassing labour. Mary, too, was tired out by her anxious vigil by the dying man. The garrison was not in a condition to keep a good watch that night.

One by one they dropped off asleep, Mary on her bed of leaves and grass in the inner corner—the safest spot—while Tom, Ted, and the soldier made up their couches across the entrance against the barrier of stones, each with his loaded rifle leaning beside the loophole he was to guard.

Ted was dreaming of I know not what—possibly of fickle, false-hearted Bella, but I should say probably not—when he was roused by Tom's hand on his shoulder.

"Hist!" whispered Tom. "Don't speak!"

"What is it?" asked Ted in the same undertone.

"Listen!"

Edward listened. There was something stirring outside. They could distinctly hear something moving among the loose stones. They could detect, too, a short, quick panting.

Could it be the friendly native who had to run for his life from some pursuers, and could not find his way to the grotto? They listened anxiously, and then they became aware that there was more than one hurried breathing. They peered out, but the night was cloudy, and they could see nothing. A cold perspiration, not of fear exactly, but of intense nervous excitement, broke out on Ted's forehead. He could feel, too, that Tom was shaking. There was something mysterious and unaccountable in these strange sounds. All at once the mystery was solved.

The heavy cloud which had obscured the moon sailed slowly away, and the faint rays struggled down through the ruins and the surrounding trees. As the light thus broke out, there came from within a few paces of the entrance of the grotto a burst

of horrible laughter. It was immediately echoed by another fiendish shriek of merriment.

At that incongruous and fearful sound both Mary and the soldier woke from their slumbers. But Tom and Edward had seen and heard enough now to be able to allay their alarm. They could see through the loopholes a couple of hyænas busily engaged in tearing down the cairn they had erected over their dead companion's grave. The hideous brutes had been guided by their terrible instinct to the place where the body was buried, and were trying to rifle the tomb.

"By Jove! I can't see this, Ted," whispered Tom, grasping his rifle.

"Don't fire, for Heaven's sake! you don't know how near the emeny may be."

"But you won't stop here and see the brutes tear the poor fellow from his grave?"

"No, certainly not! These beasts are cowardly creatures. You can drive them away with a stick, I believe. Let us try and pelt them off with stones first, and if that doesn't do, I'll go out and give them cold steel. There's plenty of time, for they have to drag away all those stones."

Saying this, Edward set to work to enlarge his loophole sufficiently to let him take aim with a stone at the hideous ghouls.

The hyænas looked up towards the grotto as soon as they heard a movement there, but took no notice, going on tearing at the stones, which, considering their size, they moved with ease.

All of a sudden they paused and snuffed the air. Then they began to shuffle about uneasily, and trot up and down, as if about to desist from their labours, and then returning, as if loath to leave them. Then they

snuffed again, looked fixedly in a certain direction, and finally, with a short, fierce yell of snappish laughter, they scampered hastily from the scene.

What could this mean? The fugitives learnt soon enough. As Tom and Ted peered out through the loopholes, they saw a long shadow glide out into the moonlight and steal silently along to the well. It might have been a ghost, so noiseless was its tread.

It was an enormous tiger? Whether it had heard the rejoicings of the hyænas, and had come to dispossess them of their banquet, or it had been accustomed to drink at the well, and was coming to slake its thirst, not knowing the well was dried up, Tom and Edward could not tell. But as it was crossing the hollow it seemed to get the wind of the grotto and its occupants. It paused,

raising its head and gazing towards the barrier, uttered a low, ominous growl.

"By Jove! it has got scent of us," said Ted.

"Yes, and here it comes," answered Tom, as the monster glided noiselessly up to the barrier.

In another second its yellow luminous eyes were glaring in through the loophole in front of Tom, and its hot breath fanned his face, as, after a few short inquiring sniffs, it gave a long fierce snort. It was rather too close to be comfortable, and Tom had a vague recollection of having read of the enormous strength of the tiger. He expected it to lean its shoulder against the stones and force its way in, or else he imagined it would dash down the barrier with one blow of its paw—I cannot tell which, for both these ideas flashed through his brain with the

rapidity of lightning. Without waiting to argue the chances, he raised his rifle, thrust it through the loophole into the beast's face, and fired.

There was a loud report, resounding with stunning effect in the confined space of the grotto, and a fierce howl from the tiger drowned in the echoes of the shot beaten back from the woods, and then all was quiet again.

"You've killed your first tiger, Tom," said Edward gravely, when the smoke cleared away and the huge brute with his head shattered to pieces lay outside the barrier. "You've killed your first tiger, and I fear your last. That shot will bring the human tigers on us before long, I'm afraid."

"What could I do, Ted? The beast was close upon us."

"He could not have pulled down the

barrier, or, at all events, there would have been time to kill him when he set about doing it.

"But even supposing the pandies heard the shot, they wouldn't know where it came from."

"Not the exact spot, but it will narrow their search within certain limits, and there outside lies the evidence against us."

"Oh, we'll lug the brute in here."

"I fancy you'll have enough of his company in ten minutes, if the morning's warm."

"Then let's throw him into the well."

"That's a better suggestion; but it will only delay our discovery a minute or so. These demons will quarter every inch of the ground as carefully as the best-bred dog."

So Tom and the soldier dragged the dead tiger to the dry well, and threw him in,

flinging in some dead leaves and grass, in order to conceal him if possible.

Tom Martindale had unconsciously conferred a great benefit on a neighbouring native village. The tiger he had shot was a notorious man-eater, which had haunted the vicinity for a long time, and had defied all the efforts of the native *shikarries* to destroy him. One of these natives was on the look-out for him on this very night, perched in a tree on the borders of the jungle. This hunter had frequently attended the *sahibs* when they came on shooting expeditions, and he at once recognised the crack of the European rifle, and was enabled by his old sporting experience to make out the quarter whence it came. He knew the sepoys were on the look-out for some fugitives, and he thought it likely they might reward the poor villager who pointed out their where-

abouts. Forgetting caution in his desire for gain, he slid down from his perch and "stalked" in the direction of the ruins. It was lucky for him that the man-eater was slain, or his avarice might have cost him dear.

He crawled up within view of the grotto just in time to see Tom and the soldier throwing the dead tiger into the dry well. He could not restrain a grunt of satisfaction on recognising the defunct monster, and he felt a sort of wondering admiration for these *sahibs*, who were such inveterate sportsmen that they would go tiger-shooting when their lives were in imminent danger. But he was not sufficiently impressed with gratitude to the *sahibs* for destroying the man-eater to relinquish his idea of betraying them to their enemies. So he marked the spot down well, and then went home to his

hut, intending to visit the mutineers the first thing in the morning.

Why should I linger over the recital?

It was near noon when Edward, whose turn it was to keep watch, gave the signal of the approach of the enemy. The sepoys were coming on in force, led by the *shikarry*, who was graphically describing what he had seen as he came along. He was so evidently guiding the enemy to their stronghold, that Tom Martindale quietly covered him with his rifle at once.

"That villager's mine, remember!" he whispered to Ted.

"You shall have him. Now, Mary, stand here and load as rapidly as you can. And remember, lads, only two of us must fire at a time, so as to have a bullet ready in case of a rush. They can only attack us from the front. The rock overhangs above

us, and the temple covers one flank, and the dry well the other. Reserve your fire till you're quite sure of your man. And now all we can pray for is that the rescue may be here soon, for our ammunition won't hold out for ever."

As he spoke, the *shikarry* and the leading sepoys descended into the little amphitheatre which was in front of the grotto. As the villager was pointing to the well and describing how he had seen the tiger hurled into it, Tom drew the trigger. The same hand that killed the tiger settled accounts with the betrayer. The *shikarry* "dropped in his tracks." Then, as Tom snatched up another loaded rifle, Edward and the soldier fired, and two of the leading sepoys bit the dust. This somewhat disorganised the others, but ere they could draw back another shot from Tom, and

then one from the soldier, laid a couple more low. The amphitheatre was speedily vacated, and the mutineers halted to consider how best to proceed. They were unable to guess how many fugitives were ensconced behind the barrier, and probably magnified the number.

At first they began by firing a volley at the barrier, but the little garrison was prepared, and the bullets only rebounded or flattened against the stones. Then came another pause, for ammunition was short in the grotto, and they did not care to throw away a shot at long range.

A few of the more courageous of the sepoys then volunteered to storm the barricade. They came dashing across the amphitheatre at the double and charged up to the barrier.

"By Jove, I expected it. Revolvers, now, lads!" said Tom, hurriedly.

And they did such execution with their revolvers that the stormers could not face the fire long, though even in the short time they held their ground they did sore damage to the defences.

Ted groaned. "Another attack like that and our barricade will fall. And then!"

"And then!" echoed Tom, dreading to look towards Mary, lest the sight of her should unnerve him.

But the sepoys did not repeat the assault immediately. They were reconnoitring, to see if they could not discover some point whence they could attack the little garrison to advantage.

All at once there came a hurried volley from the flank of the sepoys. An answering volley from the jungle followed, and

then there was a cheer and the tramp of cavalry at charge; and presently—for the little garrison could see little beyond the amphitheatre—a handful of mounted artillerymen came charging into the open. At the sight of them Tom and Edward pushed down a portion of the barrier and sprang out, rifle in hand, with a ringing cheer. It was answered with interest as the infantry came up at the double with their bayonets lowered.

The sepoys did not wait to receive them, but withdrew in tolerably good order into the jungle, whence they kept up a harassing dropping fire at times, which the rescue-party could not put a stop to, not mustering sufficiently strong to attempt to drive the enemy out of their position.

"We owe you more than our lives, sir," said Tom to the officer in command of the

relief. "We could not have held out much longer."

"No, indeed," said Ted; "another assault would have carried our defences."

"We have made all haste," said the officer; "we had no cavalry at our disposal, so we armed some of the horse artillery and made light dragoons of them—capital ones they make too. And as the march was a forced one, we put up an infantry man behind every trooper, so that's why I have that company drawn up at the edge of the jungle; they are supposed to be the head of the column,—and so they are, only the rest of it is some miles behind. So now the sooner we begin our retreat the sooner we shall come upon our supports. Put the lady on one of the horses and mount the two wounded."

And that done the retreat was commenced.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOSSES AND LABOURS.

AT about half-past ten one September morning there came an earthquake on Liverchester.

I do not mean to say that the solid ground heaved, that the steeples shook, and the people rushed forth into the streets in alarm, lest they should be buried in the ruins of their homes. But there was a portentous throe that made all Liverchester totter. The whole city trembled to its fall, and there were but too many men who returned to ruined homes. For one of the

largest houses in Liverchester had stopped payment. The firm of Golding Brothers and Glyther had found it necessary to suspend payments. In the crash of their fall they involved the destruction of many smaller ventures.

Golding's Bank was one of the oldest in Liverchester. The Goldings had been provincial Rothschilds from their first appearance on the banking stage. The business had descended from father to son until the time when Mr. Golding, Prudence Harding's late guardian, and his brother George inherited it. Our Mr. Golding—if I may so affectionately speak of Prue's uncle—had never taken any active share in the enterprise, but left it entirely to his brother, on whose death matters fell under the management of his eldest son, a young man, to be sure, but one who had the reputation of

being the steadiest and clearest-headed man of business in all Liverchester for his years.

Our Mr. Golding, perfectly satisfied with drawing a large amount of profit from the house in Centre Street, did not interfere with his nephew's operations, having enough to do to superintend his own gigantic mercantile establishment on the East Quay. He had complete confidence in his nephew's judgment and in the stability of the old house. And he was not singular in his reliance on the firm; half the merchants in Liverchester stood or fell by the house, and all the local banking business—the banking firms, in fact, of the whole county—were involved in the prosperity or misadventure of Golding Brothers and Glyther.

When, therefore, a notice was issued by the bank that, "owing to an unexpected pressure," the house was compelled "to sus-

pend payment for a time," there was a general collapse throughout the whole county.

Men who had driven their mail phaetons into Liverchester on that morning, leaving their wives and families in luxurious retirement at villas in the suburbs, returned home at lunch-time ruined men, without a penny in the world. If Liverchester's commercial prosperity had been a pagoda erected with cards, and the house of Golding and Glyther had been the basement story, the smash could not have been more complete.

And if there was desolation in the homes of the merchant princes of the neighbourhood, what, think you, was the misery which the stoppage brought to widows, spinsters, and young helpless children whose all had been deposited in the safe hands of the noted county firm?

Five millions of money! It seems an in-

exhaustible sum. One is inclined to fancy that such a vast amount would employ us a lavish lifetime to spend. But it took George Golding, Esquire, junior, of The Laurels, Liverleas, but a very brief period to dissipate. But then, of course, if a young and imprudent man speculates largely with other people's money, he may very easily get a prosperous firm into difficulties—very easily indeed.

It began to be whispered in the provincial circles that young Golding was speculating too largely. Nobody dreamt for a very long time of suspecting the solvency of the bank because he spent more money than he should have done in shares. He was welcome to invest his profits foolishly if he chose, people thought—for, of course, the property of the bank was untouched. Was not Mr. Golding, the largest and most prosperous

merchant in all Liverchester, a partner in the affair, and was it likely he would let the business go to ruin?

However, in spite of all these arguments, there came the morning in September when a humble-minded little notice fluttered on the majestic doors of the business establishment, and half Liverchester was bankrupt. Young George Golding prudently kept out of sight for some time. Ruined people have an ugly way at times of dealing roughly with those who have deceived them, and George Golding was a scrupulously neat dresser. I think his purple and fine linen would have run a chance of being ruffled even by his uncle. For that worthy gentleman had lost in the smash not only his own fortune, but all his hard earnings—to wit, the money he had acquired when his ward, Prudence, married against his wishes, and

he, in accordance with her father's will, made her a beggar.

But is this the only reason why I mention the insolvency of the great mid-county bank? Not exactly. I have said that the collapse of the central speculation brought about the failure of the numerous and small ventures in the minor towns. One after another they fell flat like a row of card-tents built by a child, when the juvenile architect gives a slight fillip to the first building in the line. P-r-r-r-t!—the swift destruction flies along the row, and devastation reigns.

Now it was in one of these banks—in Woodland and Mingay's Bank at Scalperton, to be particular—that James and Prudence Harding had placed what little money they had scraped together for their children's education. It was not a monstrous sum, but it was their all.

James received the unwelcome tidings one morning at breakfast. Prue saw his scared face as he read the letter, and began to wonder what the bad news was.

"Why, James, what has happened? Good gracious, how pale you have turned!"

"What has happened, Prue? Nothing, except that we are ruined!"

"How do you mean? Has the bishop—"

"No, my dear, the blow comes from the temporal powers. Woodland and Mingay have suspended payment."

"But if they have got our money they can't, can they? They must pay us back what we put in."

"I'm afraid we shall recover but little of it. They say they are deeply involved by the failure of your uncle's business. At all events, he hasn't made much of the money he robbed you of."

"No, James; but isn't this failure of the bank a sort of consolation to us? If my uncle had let me have the money, we should have lost it all the same, and we should have felt the loss more acutely."

"Humph! That's odd reasoning, Prue. You don't agree with the poet that

> 'Tis better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.'

Perhaps, after all, you are right. It is better to have been poor than to have had a hundred thousand pounds in Mr. Golding's bank. It's bad enough to lose the little drop in the ocean that we have contributed—bad enough, Prue, to think that the store we were setting by for the little folk is irrevocably gone."

"Poor little mites!" said Prue, looking out of the window towards her children disporting on the lawn under the charge of

Martha. "Poor little mites! But, thank goodness! they don't feel what it is! They would be far more likely to cry if you mowed away the daisies and buttercups on the lawn, than at all the bank-failures in the world."

James shook his head. This philosophy, he felt, was very well in its way, but, after all, it was not a complete balm for a blow that in plain words meant complete ruin. Fortunately Prue had been a prudent manager, and in her determination not to lessen the children's little store by a single sixpence, had contrived to avoid running into debt in the smallest way. So that her tradesmen could not press for the settlement of their bills—as they were doing all through the neighbourhood—at the very moment when the payment was most inconvenient. Still, the mere loss of the money they had placed in

Woodland and Mingay's was not the only injury they suffered. Some of their parishioners suffered severely, and James had immense difficulty in collecting his tithes, while in more than one instance the tenants of the glebe were completely ruined, and he lost his rent.

Now indeed Prue regretted that her literary efforts had failed to bring her in any money. How proud she would have been could she but have placed a few hundreds at had husband's disposal, with the announcement she had won them at the point of her pen! But it was not so fated. She knew that it was a vain dream to think of attempting any further essays in that line, so she puzzled and pondered, in the hope of discovering some new way of realising a little money.

"James, dear," she said at last, after rack-

ing her brains for about a week, "I think it wouldn't be a bad plan to advertise for a couple of little girls to bring up with Prue."

"Why, my child, you'd tire yourself to death with such work. Teaching children is such anxious work. No; I think I had better furbish up my scholarship, and take a few pupils."

"We can do both, James. I'm sure teaching little girls their alphabets can't be half so bad as bringing up young men. I'm sure my heart used to ache for poor Mr. Mather, my cousin's private tutor, for he used to lead a life of it."

Finally it was determined that both plans should be put into execution. It doesn't appear to be any very terrible sacrifice at first sight, but it was a very great one. It was the end of all home comfort. Hitherto Prue and her husband had had a little

world of their own within the parsonage gates. When they closed those they shut out all worry and annoyance, and found sunshine amid the gloomiest weather in their domestic happiness. By their own fireside they could sit side by side, retired from all petty troubles and cares which could only affect them as the wind did that howled outside. They but drew the closer together, and felt their home enjoyments heightened by the contrast with the trouble without.

Now all this was at an end. The two lads whom James had to prepare for college were fair enough specimens of their class, but they introduced a discordant element, and necessitated a change in the quiet tenour of life at the vicarage.

James had to work very hard now too. He had to read up all his work for them, for a few years of neglect had turned his

classical knowledge into a very wilderness, that needed much pruning and training. He was quite able to put the lads into the right way of reading, and could thoroughly prepare them for their earliest examinations. But to help them really in mastering the studies they had to undertake, to give them a sound grounding in the books they were taking in, James had to read hard enough himself. Little did the lads know when they retired for the night that James sat himself down, lexicon at elbow, to prepare his lesson for the next day, and had to struggle with it almost as hard as they did.

In the meantime, too, he had all his parish work to get through; for James was sorely opposed to the notion of a clergyman who neglected his people in order to make money as a tutor. Such a man, he used to say, should have been a college fellow, not a

parish priest. So he was, perhaps, over-scrupulous not to allow his attention to his pupils to interfere with his labours in the village. Prue, however, made herself very useful, and undertook a good deal of the less important work. She, too, had her little pupils to look after, but that was not a very laborious duty.

But altogether the old seclusion was gone, and with it the old quiet and rest. James had no time now for pleasant chats of an evening. If he had an hour or so to himself, he was so weary that he was glad to fling himself down to sleep on the sofa.

"How long will this last?" Prudence used to ask herself as she sat by the fire watching James's pale, weary face. And then she would build castles in the air, until she too began to nod in the easy-chair, until the lads came in from their studies, or

Martha came in with the supper-tray. There was but little holiday at the parsonage now.

Things did not go very smoothly at the Manor-house either. Of course, the Squire's property being chiefly in land, he was not seriously affected by the failure of Golding's bank, but he had nevertheless lost a great deal more than even a rich man cares to lose in such a way. As a rule I fancy people do *not* like to lose anything through no fault of their own, and the Squire was certainly not more amiable than the majority of his fellow-men. Indeed, I should be inclined to admit that he was considerably less so than most; so that, when he found that he had been flinging his money into a rotten sack, he was furious. It was anything but a pleasant time for any one at the Manor-house for several weeks after the crash. Even Philip, who was down for a

few days, was glad to pack up his portmanteau and to be recalled "on urgent business" to London.

Philip had been induced to come down by filial affection. He was anxious, he wrote, to see how his father was, now that he was left *solus*, and having a brief holiday would run down and stop a short time.

"Wants some money, I suppose," growled the Squire, when he read the letter. And the Squire was not far wrong. Philip of late had several times applied to his father for "advances," as he called them, so that the Squire had some reason for suspecting his son's affectionate solicitude for his health.

The fact is, as I have before mentioned, Philip was growing idle. Now that he was Marcus Lysaght's brother-in-law he went into society a great deal more than he had done before. He was looking about for an

heiress, he told his sister and father; but in reality it was rather the society of young men of fashion that he affected. He took to sporting, and made a book, which was not a very successful one at all times, for the sort of literature which is most popular among the turfy is not quite so easy as novel-writing, and needs great experience. Philip's apprenticeship to the ring cost him dear. His warmest friends fleeced him, for in betting, as in love, a man thinks nothing of stealing a march on his most intimate friend.

A series of heavy losses had rather told upon Philip's finances. He had been more than ordinarily extravagant, too, this year, relying on what he believed to be his "safe pots on the races" to make up for a few excesses. Then, again, his prosperous company had of late become just a suspicion shaky, and salaries were not paid with the

accustomed punctuality. No wonder, then, that all of a sudden he became anxious to see how his father's health was progressing. A little tightness in the money market is a wonderful stimulant to the affections.

When, however, the news of the suspension of payment at Golding's bank arrived at Bremning, Philip saw it was no use to ask his father for any more advances, and when the old gentleman began to make the Manor-house rather more lively than comfortable, he made up his mind and his luggage, and started back to town.

He was all anxiety for employment now, but unfortunately it was vacation-time, and even supposing it had been term-time, he would not have got very much to do; for of late solicitors had discovered that the once industrious and rising young barrister, Mr. Philip Charlwood, was not quite so atten-

tive as he had been to his duties. He lost several important cases, and his clients somehow would have it that he had not studied his briefs. And, after all, unless a barrister does study his brief, he can hardly hope to be successful, even by aid of the most brilliant intellect that ever puzzled a jury or bewildered a judge.

Philip determined to make a descent on Marcus, so he wrote over to Ireland to tell his brother-in-law that he had been overworking himself, and wanted a little change of air for his health; might he run over to the Emerald Isle and recruit?

Marcus wrote back to say that unfortunately they could not ask him over. His father was in such a dangerous state that his physicians had given him over, and under these circumstances Philip would hardly find a visit pleasant.

"Confounded lucky fellow, Marcus!" said Philip, as he read the letter. "Doesn't want money a bit, and here's the old boy popping off to leave him the title and estates; while here am I confoundedly hard up, and the governor's in fine health, and as savage as a bear. Confounded bore that I can't run over to Marcus! I don't like to write and ask him to lend me anything; but I must get the money somehow or another!"

Now, since money, like any other commodity, is always to be had at a price, supposing you don't mind paying (or promising to pay) pretty dear for it, there is no great reason why, when a man like Philip says he must have it, he should not get it.

There was to be met in Piccadilly and the park in those days a fresh-coloured, dandified gentleman who was on excellent terms with himself, and who had a bowing ac-

quaintance with nearly all the men, and with only a very few, and a very questionable few, of the ladies, that one meets in the fashionable quarter of an afternoon in the season.

He had a nice complexion, dark hair, greyish blue eyes. He wore neatly-curled whiskers and a natty imperial on his chin, and his clothes were faultless in fit and quality, though there was an indescribable slanginess about them. There was a vulgar assumption about the fellow, moreover, as he strutted along, with his hat jauntily perched over his left ear, and with a camellia in his button-hole. He was always met with a pleasant smile by his acquaintances in the Row—until his back was turned. It was clear that men disliked and despised him, but somehow did not like to offend him :—*nec mirum!* For who but Joe Davison had

smashed up that eminent lawyer, Serjeant Marsh, because—so people said—that ornament of the legal profession had once cracked a joke about Moses and money-lending? Both allusions were unpleasant to Joe Davison, whose father had been verger—or whatever the Hebrew equivalent for that functionary may be—at a synagogue in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel, and who had an elegant house in a fine street leading out of a fashionable square, with a sort of side-entrance and a species of office, where one might meet some of the greatest swells about town. In short, Joe Davison was a rich Jew, who "knew a party" anxious to lend a few thousands to deserving young men with large expectations.

It was a sign of the growing taste for fashionable life which distinguished Philip that he was now on nodding terms with Joe Davison

—that he was to be seen calling on Joe in his elegant crib in Vavasour Street, and that Joe breakfasted with Philip once or twice —indeed, had all of a sudden been taken with such an admiration for the rising young barrister that he actually treasured up one or two autographs of his, consisting of signatures written across narrow strips of paper impressed with a government stamp.

CHAPTER IX.

CYPRESS AND LAUREL.

THE body of men that had rescued Edward Harding and his little garrison from such imminent peril began their retreat in an orderly manner. But unfortunately the brief delay necessary for the removal of Mary and the wounded men gave the enemy time to reconnoitre, and they soon discovered the weakness of the relieving party. With the odds on their sides the mutineers could be brave enough, and they pressed the retreating troops sorely. The route along which the retreat lay was an intricate and

difficult one. It was bad ground, consisting of patches of jungle, with here and there a yawning nullah with rugged and precipitous sides, worn by the winter torrents of streams that now slid away mere threads of water in the bottoms of the parched channels.

The sepoys knew the country well, and galled the retreating force with an incessant fire from every point of vantage on either side. In vain did the little body of cavalry push on, while the infantry skirmished on either side to drive the enemy off. The mutineers retreated before their advance, and followed them up as they withdrew.

Anxiously and eagerly did they look for the head of the advancing column, for as soon as that came in sight they knew the sepoys would abandon the pursuit. But in the meantime they were suffering heavily from the fire kept up from every side.

The officer in command was almost beside himself with rage. Tears stood in his eyes —not the womanly tears of fear, but the hot drops of anger and impatience—as he saw his men falling round him, shot down without an opportunity of retaliation.

"By Heaven I shan't be able to stand this much longer!" he said, riding up to Edward. "Will you undertake a dangerous errand for the sake of these brave fellows who pushed on to your rescue?"

"To be sure I will, gladly!" said Ted.

"I want you to push on ahead with our guide there, and hasten up the advance of the column."

The native was mounted on the horse of a slain artilleryman, and he and Edward pushed on under cover of a volley from the infantry.

But their purpose was divined by the

sepoys, and many a shot whistled past them as they pressed onward across the open plain which, intersected with dry water-courses, stretched between the belt of jungle they had just quitted and a yet denser forest which lay between them.

Over such ground a light-footed native could almost keep up with their horses, for they had every now and then to pull up and make a circuit round some obstacle which lay in their path. A few of the swiftest of the sepoys pursued them on their left flank, keeping just within range, and firing at them whenever a check in their course offered a favourable opportunity.

Before they had ridden very far, and while the edge of the forest was some hundred yards off, a shot took effect on the native.

"If I fall, don't stop, sahib; ride straight

ahead. You can find your way through the forest by the traces left by our advance this morning, and the troops must be in the plain beyond if they haven't already entered the jungle. I fear I shall not be able to sit in my saddle long; I'm bleeding very fast."

"My brave fellow! stick to your horse as long as you can. We may meet the column sooner than you expect. Shall we halt, and I'll bind up the wound? Where is it?"

"It's no use, sahib. The shot has injured the lungs; I can feel it from the pain of breathing. But I'll cling to my seat while I can, for I will not fall into their hands alive."

The poor fellow's voice grew fainter as he spoke, and he reeled in his saddle. The red blood poured down over his white dress. Ted saw that nothing could save him, and

presently with a stifled groan and a dull rattle in his throat the gallant native bent forward over his saddle-bow, and fell headlong to the ground, dead.

The pursuers gave a shout of triumph. They had evidently been aiming chiefly at the native, to which fact Edward had owed his safety principally. Now the bullets came singing past him in most unpleasant frequency and propinquity. All of a sudden his horse gave a plunge and reared. Ted was almost thrown from his saddle, but he recovered himself at once, and looking down saw the blood pouring from a wound in the poor animal's neck.

"Good heavens! if it should fall under me before I can reach the jungle!" thought Ted, and a cold perspiration stood on his forehead at the thought.

But, luckily for him, the horse did strug-

gle gallantly on. The wound was not a mortal one, though the loss of blood was beginning to tell on the pace, when, to his great delight, Ted caught a glimpse of the troops coming through the trees.

In a few minutes the soldiers had come up to him. His pursuers disappeared, and Edward found breath to tell the officer in command of the peril in which the advance was placed. Not a moment was lost. On they went at the double, Ted dismounting and keeping up with the head of the column.

Let us now see how the little body he had left was doing.

When they got about half-way across the open they halted and formed in square, with the cavalry in the middle. The men were too weary to retreat farther, and could not return the enemy's fire with any effect. The manœuvre was tolerably successful, but

the sepoys, taking advantage of a nullah on their right flank, flung out a body of picked shots, that kept up a telling fire, while protected by the inequalities of the ground from any return volleys. It was necessary to attempt to dislodge this party, so the cavalry charged them. The sepoys retreated along the bed of the torrent where the horse could not continue the pursuit. As they were exposed to the fire from the borders of the jungle, they could not hold the post, so they had to retire to the main body, whereupon, of course, the sepoys returned to the position they had abandoned, and poured a damaging volley into their ranks. At the same time a heavy fusillade was kept up from the jungle, and, being thus taken in flank and rear, the little troop suffered severely.

When the charge was proposed, Tom Martindale, in spite of his weakness, insisted

on taking part in it. The cavalry were but few in number at best, and as he had taken one trooper's horse, it was but fair, he declared, that he should also take his duty. When the retreat came, and the galling cross-fire was so severe that the only hope of saving a man of them was to give orders to them to set spurs and gallop back as fast as they could, Tom fell a little in the rear, and when the troopers pulled up at the square, Tom was not among them. He had heen hit, and had fallen about half-way between the two positions.

Fortunately for poor Mary, she was in the midst of the square, and could not see what had befallen her husband. All her attention, too, was centred just now in her child, for the baby was dangerously ill from cold and exposure—dying, in fact, as all eyes but hers could read in its face.

Meantime the column with Edward at its head was seen advancing from the wood. The sepoys pushed out supports to their party in the nullah, and it seemed as if there were going to be a pitched battle.

But the officer in command of the rescue felt that the mutineers would not show so bold a front if they did not count on some large reinforcements, and thought it prudent to make good his retreat at once, before his men gave out from sheer fatigue.

Just as all was ready for the retreat, Tom Martindale, whom we left lying in the open between friends and foes, began to recover consciousness, and seeing his position and the preparations for a retreat, staggered to his feet and tried to rejoin the troops. In an instant a hundred bullets ploughed up the ground round him. One took effect in his leg, and brought him to the ground, but

Tom struggled forward on hands and knees, for it was for dear life he was struggling.

On seeing him still alive, several of the sepoys sprang out of the nullah and made towards him with the intention of bayoneting him. But Edward Harding was as quick as they. He snatched a musket from the nearest soldier, and flew to the rescue of his friend.

"Look out, Tom! look behind you!" he shouted, for one of the mutineers was close upon the wounded man with clubbed musket, prepared to dash out his brains.

Tom looked round at the warning shout, and had just time to hurl his discharged revolver at his enemy, with such good aim as to strike him on the wrist as he was raising his gun over his head to strike. Before he had time to recover, Ted had dashed up, and, striding across Tom, gave the

sepoy the point in his throat. In an instant a couple more closed with him, but Ted kept them at bay.

Tom meantime had taken his friend's revolver, and with its last undischarged barrel knocked over one of the assailants. There was not a second to lose, though all was done in far less time than it takes me to describe it. Ted saw that to prolong his contest with the sepoy would give the others time to come up, so without wasting a precious moment in parrying, he drove straight at his foe, received a thrust on his breastplate which luckily glanced off his gorget, and pinned the fellow to the ground. Then, without waiting to withdraw the weapon, he caught Tom up, flung him over his shoulder, and ran back to the main body with him.

"That ought to be the Victoria Cross!" said the commanding officer, as Ted re-

entered the square amidst the cheers of the troops.

In another minute the retreat began, and was effected without much loss, the enemy abandoning the pursuit after a mile or so.

By the time they reached Kholaghur the losses had been pretty heavy, for the forced marches had told severely on the wounded, and many of them fell out along the march to die. When they arrived at the fort the surgeons paid prompt attention to the sufferers, who were placed in hospital at once.

Ted had been greatly alarmed for Tom, who seemed to grow very weak, so he asked the surgeon who attended him if the hurts were dangerous.

"Are you a great friend of his?" said the surgeon.

"Almost like a brother," said Edward.

"Then you had better undertake the

painful task of breaking the intelligence to his wife. He can't get over it. Want of medical care for his first wound, added to the excitement and fatigue he has undergone since, has made him too weak to get over the shock to the system from the second wound. We have done all we can. The wounds of themselves are not positively mortal, but he is so exhausted he has no rallying power. I don't know whether he or his child will die first, for the poor little thing is sinking too. I haven't the heart to tell the mother, and upon my word I don't know how you will be able to do it!"

"Does Martindale know there is no hope for him?"

"I think he guesses as much, but I'm afraid of the shock, so I shan't speak of it yet unless he questions me. He may linger a day or two, for he has a stout heart and

a strong constitution; one less tenacious of life would have broken down long since."

"And yet there's no hope?"

"None."

Poor Ted was quite unmanned by this sad news. He could not summon courage to see either Tom or Mary just then, but went away to the quarters that had been allotted to him in the fort, and there in silence went through his agony. It seemed to him as if half his life were going, thus to lose the beloved friend who had become even dearer than ever now for the perils they had passed through together.

In the meantime Tom learned from the surgeon's own lips how near his end was. He had detected a look in the doctor's face that told him of the danger, and he begged him to speak frankly, and tell him if there

was any hope. The doctor pressed his hand, and shook his head sadly.

"My poor little Mary!" cried Tom, faintly. "My poor little Mary, and my poor darling baby!"

"Poor little thing!" said the surgeon—"poor wife!"

And he turned away with a sigh.

Tom lay very quiet for some time. When a man is told that his last hour is near, it is but natural that he should turn his eyes back on his past for awhile. There was nothing tn Tom's life to make the retrospection bitter. He regretted the estrangement between his father and himself, but he could not reproach himself for its cause. "Ah, if he had known what a wife my Mary would make to me, he would not have said a word against it."

By-and-by Tom sent one of the hospital

orderlies to look for Edward Harding, and bring him to his bedside.

When Edward came Tom saw that he knew all.

"So the doctor has told you, Ted. Well, old fellow, the dearest and best friends must part, I suppose, for a time. You'll take care of Mary and the baby for me?"

Ted could not speak, but he pressed the wasted hand that he clasped with both of his.

"Does she know it, Ted?"

Edward shook his head. "I couldn't have the heart to tell her, Tom," he said in a broken voice.

"Poor girl!—perhaps she had better hear it from me. How long have I, Ted? Did the doctor tell you?"

"No, my dear old boy, he said it might be hours—days perhaps."

"No, not days, Ted! It won't be days I can feel. I feel so faint that it seems as if I have only to close my eyes and cease to wish for life, and then I should pass away. You'll be kind to Mary when I'm gone?"

"Tom, may I suggest something to you?"

"What is it, old-friend?"

"Let me write a letter at your dictation to your father. He loves you very dearly, Tom, and if he thought you did not leave the world in kindness to him it would almost break his heart. And he will be able to aid Mary far better than I, a poor soldier, could do."

"Dear old dad! he musn't think I have forgotten all his long love and goodness. You shall write for me, Ted. Will you do it at once, for I'm afraid after I have told poor Mary I shall be too weak and unmanned. Poor child, the doctors have made her

go and lie down, and they have given her a sleeping draught—she's worn out with anxiety and terror."

Edward Harding sat down by his friend's bedside and wrote a farewell letter for him to his poor old father. Poor Tom! He could not reproach himself for the interruption of their affectionate relations, but he bitterly lamented that they had parted more coldly than they had ever done before in their lives.

He committed his wife and child to his father's care. He knew that when he was dead his father would be kind to his dear ones, and he told him what a noble, affectionate wife Mary had been to him.

Edward could hardly see for tears how to write the simple, manly words of his dying friend. But at last the mournful task was

over. Then Tom begged him to bring Mary and the child.

Mary had just woke up, and was much refreshed and restored. The baby, poor little thing, was looking more like death than ever —even Mary was alarmed now. Edward brought them to the bedside of Tom, and then withdrew.

Of the anguish of that interview no words of mine could give you an idea. I haven't the heart to attempt to describe it. But Tom comforted his poor wife, and at last the bitterness was over for awhile, and she was calm, for he was yet with her. She never quitted his side again until the end. for in the quiet watches of the night she felt a faint pressure of her husband's hand. She bent over him and heard him say very faintly——

"Good-bye, God bless you!"

And then she stooped down and kissed him—and it was all over.

Then the anguish and the bitterness returned more acutely than ever, and Mary wrestled with her grief and despair all alone by the side of her dead. And the morning looking in at the window found her asleep beside him she loved—sleeping the sleep that comes of long weeping. When they woke her she was more calm, but it was the calm that springs of a broken heart. She had wept until she had no more tears to shed; even the news that her child was gone could but add one short, sharp spasm of pain to her aching heart.

She bore up against her grief until she saw her husband aud her baby laid together in a grave in the cemetery without the gates of Kholaghur. But after the earth had closed upon her treasures her strength failed

her. She was stricken down, and lay for several weeks on the narrow border which divides this world from the next.

Edward Harding, too, now that the dangers were over and the reaction had begun to set in, took a fever, and was in hospital for a couple of months. He rose from his bed a mere skeleton, and the surgeons declared that the only hope of saving his life was to send him home at once. For the mutiny was at an end now, and the British rule preserved in India. So Ted and Mary, with many other invalids, were sent by easy stages in palanquins to the nearest coast, and put on board transports bound for England.

And the same ship that took Ted home bore also a report to the military authorities, in which "Lieutenant Edward Harding, 203rd Berkshire Rifles, was especially re-

commended to notice for his unflinching bravery in rescuing a wounded officer and carrying him off under a severe fire, engaging and killing two of his assailants."

The little bit of bronze for which Edward had so often sighed, and for an opportunity of winning which he had longed and looked so earnestly, was almost within his grasp now. But he did not think of it or care for it much now. He was sick and sore at heart, and would have given all the Victoria Crosses in the world to win back the beloved friend who was sleeping under the walls of Kholaghur.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN TO OLD ENGLAND.

WEARILY passed away the days of travel for Edward Harding. For poor Mary Martindale they were no worse than any days were, now that all she had prized in life was gone. You would scarcely have known her again, so thin and pale and wasted had she become under her sorrow. Her sorrow was not demonstrative, but the calm was the calm of a heart that was dead, of a life that had no further care or hope or joy in this world. There was a patient but yet wistful look in her eyes, as if she was

resigned to her loss, which was but for a while, but yet was looking anxiously for the hour that was to unite her to her dear ones.

One of the first things Ted had done on the death of Tom was to send off the letter which his dying friend had dictated to him for Mr. Martindale. With it he also wrote a letter, begging Mr. Martindale to communicate with him as to what could be done for poor Mary. The child, he told the old gentleman, was dead as well as the father, and there was only this poor broken-hearted girl-widow left—the only legacy his son could bequeath him.

Old Mr. Martindale was growing sorely tired of his position and his life. It was something to have worked himself from a humble position to be an under-secretary, but he ceased now to take any pride in his

success. He was a rich man, but what was wealth to him when his son—his only heir —was estranged?

In truth, the old gentleman was breaking fast. He had official worries as well as private afflictions to bear up against. The inquiry into the army-administration after the close of the Crimean war had been a terrible blow to him. He was conscious that, to the best of his ability, he had always done his duty as far as the system would admit; he had indeed been the originator of one or two reforms in the system. But when the collapse came, and the exposure of official blunders in the papers followed, he was hurt to find himself misrepresented. It was bad enough to have the office decried, and all its faults held up to public scorn. But it was infinitely harder to find himself connected with the errors—to have

them, in fact, attributed to him—by writers in the press.

You see, in a case of this sort, it was necessary to have a scapegoat. That would make it easier for the writers of the stinging leaders, not to mention that an attack on an individual is, of course, always more telling and trenchant than a general condemnation of a system or a body of representatives. So the whole flight of penshafts was directed at the permanent under-secretary. The secretary, it was argued by the papers, was a bird of passage who came in with a ministry, and was perhaps turned out by its fall just when he was beginning to master the details of his work; whereas the permanent under-secretary was practically the head of the office, was acquainted with all its workings, and had every opportunity of finding where the system was

faulty. Now there was much that was true in this, but one consideration was overlooked. Mr. Martindale had been a clerk in the office himself, and his present subordinates and former fellow-officials regarded all he did with a certain sort of jealousy. They were not, as a rule, enthusiastic public servants. They liked their salaries, and if they did not like the system, at all events they hated change. They had to run in that wretched official groove all their lives, but they were strongly opposed to any alteration in that groove, because it would involve trouble. Least of all did they think they were called on to submit to any innovations dictated by one who was, after all, one of themselves. Whenever Mr. Martindale wished to improve the rules and traditions, he was met by a stolid, stubborn opposition that he could never con-

quer, and could only very rarely conciliate. He knew from experience that it was hopeless to introduce a regulation, which was absolutely perfect even, in the teeth of this feeling, because the excellence of the regulation would only be proved by its working, and its working would depend on the willingness of the men who had to carry it out.

Even this was not all. His chiefs deserted the brave old boy. They felt that public opinion must have its victim, and they were none of them anxious to appear in that capacity. But here, they argued, was the man who ought to be glad of the opportunity of suffering. He had been promoted by the higher authorities from the ranks, and had a splendid position, and the least he could do in gratitude was to submit to being the cockshy of the press now that

such a sacrifice was needed. This view of the matter was delicately suggested to Mr. Martindale. He did not "concur" (as he generally did in his minutes) with their lordships' opinions, but he was a born clerk —he had first walked in red tape leading-strings, and he knew better than to dispute and make a scandal. No matter how severely he was handled in the press, it was against official etiquette for him to defend himself. If the chiefs of his office were silent, he must "grin and bear it,"—and he did.

To be sure, he was given to understand that a title would be the reward of his vicarious suffering. There had been a time when such an announcement would have far more than repaid him for the pain. But a title had no charm for him now, when the dream of his life was gone, and when

his son, instead of making a brilliant match, and establishing the family in a place in good society, had married a governess, and taken a commission in a marching regiment.

After the Inquiry was closed, and the reforms it suggested were carried out, in the amalgamation of the departments, Mr. Martindale was, at his own request, and to the delight of those who had made him the scapegoat, allowed to retire from active service. He had reason to regret the step he had taken before very long. Inactivity was very distasteful to him, and he hated the country, so that he couldn't find employment in looking after his estates. There was nothing to do but to mope about at the clubs, where he was considered rather a bore, because he occasionally made a confidential defence of himself against the late commis-

sion, when he caught any one that he could make a listener of.

He had been all his life talking of his hard work and incessant occupation. How often had he described how intensely he should enjoy himself when he was freed from his harness, and could kick up his heels in peaceful pastures, where there were no Estimates and no Mutiny Act, where Clothing Colonels were unknown, and new patterns for gold lace and buttons existed not! Now the harness was off—but where was the peaceful pasture?

Who invented the proverbial complaint that no man ever obtains his wishes? It's an incorrect saying. A man does not always win his heart's desire—but it is the greatest mercy that he does not. Better to be disappointed, and enjoy mentally the delights you imagine will be yours when your wish

is accomplished. Better to imagine how the rosy apples would taste if they were yours, than to pluck them and find them turn to ashes and bitterness on your lips.

Both Mr. Martindale and Edward Harding have gained objects which they once desired, and how little value are they now that that they have them! When Edward set sail from England for his first campaign, he was worse than a beggar, with a blank future before him. But he had ambitious dreams of a military career, and one lurking longing—one strong and secret determination—to win the Victoria Cross. It was as good as his now, but of what value was it? I'd rather be the ruined man, with his slender hopes, going out to fight fortune with a brave heart, than this poor broken-spirited invalid going home to receive the threepenn'orth of bronze that he had so longed for. Fame,

distinction, promotion were before him, but they could not turn into a smiling garden the wilderness through which his future lay.

Mr. Martindale had dreamed of a peerage to be conferred on him after long years of devoted service. He had imagined himself wealthy, with a good position in society. And these things had seemed to him the very summit of human bliss. Now they were within his grasp, and what were they worth? A title that he could not transmit—which would die with him; riches that could do nothing more for him than buy him a vault in Kensal Green; a good position in society—the society of those who had sacrificed him and libelled him.

It may seem hard to be disappointed in all our hopes, but it is often but a blessing in disguise. If it be sore to bear, it is worse to

win your wish and find it is but vanity and vexation of spirit.

Deep was Mr. Martindale's affliction when he heard of his son's death. In spite of their quarrel, he loved his son ardently, and was always hoping he would return. After all he had gone through, he began to think Tom might have chosen the wiser path. What did *his* notion of supreme happiness turn out to be? An empty delusion. His son had chosen more wisely perhaps, for affection, after all, thought the lone old man, is worth anything else in the world.

He repented bitterly that he had driven his son from him. He had made the boy his friend and companion. Their relations had been more like those of brothers than of father and son, yet he had expected the lad to bow when for the first time he tried to exert parental authority. Was it wrong,

then, to let his son hold so familiar a relation? Not a bit; the wrong was in trying to compel the lad's affections. But for that, and the consequent necessity of trying to oblige him to submit by the exercise of fatherly authority, they might have been friends and brothers to the day of his death.

The only thing the poor old man could think of to appease his remorse, was to treat his son's widow with all love and tenderness. He wrote at once to Ted, begging him, for the sake of his dead friend and his broken-hearted father, to send Mary home to him, and to endeavour to remove from her mind the unfavourable impression which his past conduct must have made.

There comes a finish at last to the longest journey. Sitting on the deck one sultry afternoon, Edward saw what seemed a line of cloud on the distant horizon. As the

vessel plunged forward, beating back a cataract of white spray from her bows, and leaving a long seething ribbon of creamy foam in her wake, the far line of cloud widened and rose from the wave, and presently a fleck of sunlight smote upon it, making a white streak, and by-and-by it was possible to descry that it had a green crest, and was, in fact, the wall of white cliffs that bounds the south-eastern shores of England.

The news that England was in sight had spread over the ship by this time, and the passengers came crowding forward, where Edward was leaning over the bulwarks, to catch a glimpse of the land that so many of them had never hoped to see again. Cripples, who had left that shore in the full possession of strength and limb, hobbled on their crutches to gaze towards it eagerly, and strove to picture the kind faces that

would greet them when they touched the land. Men who had quitted England in the glory of health crawled along, pale, wasted ghosts of their former selves, to view her coasts once again, and sigh with relief to think there was their home, where they might recruit their shattered energies. There were tears on many a bronzed cheek that had never blanched in battle, for eyes that could look death defiantly in the face grew dim at the sight of native land.

There was one incident which touched Edward greatly. A poor fellow, quite a lad, who had been blinded by the explosion of a shell, had begged some of his comrades to lead him to the bows of the ship, and having ascertained in which direction the land lay, was standing motionless, with his darkened orbs turned towards England. If he could not see its shore, he seemed con-

tent that the breeze which blew from it should fan his poor pale cheek.

Edward went and reported to Mary that England was at last in sight, and she, too, came forward to look at it. But she was not able to stay long on deck. Thoughts came crowding so thickly upon her as she remembered the time when she and her husband sailed for India, and watched those same white cliffs as they sank below the waves, and twilight came on and the stars started out one by one in the purple vault, before the pale green light of the dying sunset had ceased to linger over the sea where England had faded from sight.

The vessel arrived in port in due time, and Edward, after a rest of two or three days, took Mary up to town. His health was so terribly shaken that the medical man who had charge of the invalids on board

the *Osprey* had recommended him to go to London and have the best advice he could get. So he took Mary to Mr. Martindale's, and left her there, thinking it best not to intrude on the melancholy interview which would take place between the mourners. Then he went to consult Dr. Borradaile, the celebrated physician, and was lucky enough to find him in, which was great good fortune, for the doctor was in such request he had hardly time to eat, drink, or sleep.

The physician listened attentively, with a grave face, to Edward's story, and then examined him very carefully.

"Where do you live?" he asked, at last.

Edward hesitated: he had no home. The doctor saw he had made a slip.

"Of course," he said, "you're unsettled just now. I meant did you intend to live in town or country?"

"I hardly know. In fact, I haven't given the matter a thought as yet. But I shall go down to see my brother in the country."

"Ah! that's right. What part of England is it?"

"Bremning Minor, near Scalperton," answered Ted; "my brother is parson of the place."

"What! is your brother the Rev. James Harding, who was formerly curate in Liverchester?"

"Yes, he is. Have you ever met with him?"

"No, I have not; but I should be proud to do so, for I have heard from my cousin, Dr. Jeremy, how nobly he behaved during the cholera times. You had better go down to him at once, for you want the quiet of the country, and the attention of those who know

what it is to fight against long illnesses."

"What! am I going to be laid up for a long time?" asked Ted, with a heavy sigh.

"It's better to tell you honestly at once that you are. You have had a terrible shaking, and your constitution is so weakened that it cannot recover. You have no spring in you to recover lost ground, and nothing but perfect rest and quiet can cure you. It is of no use to give you medicines. A generous but prudent diet, a few tonics, tranquillity, comfort, and country air are the only things that will do you good. With them I earnestly hope that we shall bring you round in time."

Had Ted known more of the doctor, he would have guessed from these words, accompanied as they were by no smile, and with no cheerfulness in their tone, that there was more the matter with him than appeared at

first sight. When he offered the fee the doctor refused to take it—he should be ashamed to take a shilling of James Harding's brother. Moreover, when Edward was gone, he wrote James a note telling him that Edward, though he had not alarmed him by saying so, was in a very precarious state of health, and would need every care and attention to enable him to battle through.

The letter reached James by the same post which brought one from Ted saying he was coming down for a few weeks to recruit his strength. You may be sure there were active preparations made to receive him.

In the meanwhile, let us watch the meeting between Mary and Mr. Martindale.

When she arrived Mr. Martindale was from home, so she went in and sat down, not sorry for the opportunity of a little time to collect herself. Mr. Martindale's house

was one of those gloomy mansions British grandees delighted in some years back. There was a melancholy cold stone staircase, with dark, heavy balustrades, and a single window to light it—a window that let in but little light through panes of ground glass, with a border of yellow. When she had toiled up the echoing flight of wide chilly steps, she was ushered into a dim drawing-room, with sombre furniture, and tall, narrow windows, obscured by heavy curtains.

She had not to wait long; in about five minutes the door opened, and her father-in-law, whom she had never seen, entered in deep mourning. They looked at each other sadly for a moment, and then the old man took her by both hands and drew her towards him.

"Can my daughter forgive me?" he asked in a low voice.

A pressure of his hand was the only answer she could give. Words would not come, or she would have told him how fondly his son always spoke of him, and how he had taught her to love him. She would have told him that, if he had made her suffer infinitely more, their common grief as they stood by poor Tom's grave would have drawn them together. It was not till some time after, when the strangeness had died out, and when the first bitter keenness of their grief had worn off, that they talked of Tom. At present neither mentioned him—they could not trust themselves to speak of him, but he occupied their thoughts entirely.

"You will not leave me, will you?" asked the old man, thinking that Mary probably would wish to return to her own family.

"I have no home and no friends," said Mary.

"You must not say you have no home: this is your home, and I am your father, my child. You will not leave me?"

Mary did not speak, but pressed his hand. In truth, she felt she could not live in that gloomy place. She must try and find some active and engrossing employment. Here she feared she should brood over her sorrow, and she knew that was unwholesome. Tom had made her promise to keep up a brave heart, and she would be true to her word. But she had not the heart to tell old Mr. Martindale this; he seemed so anxious to make reparation for the past, so desirous of giving his son's widow shelter and comfort and fatherly affection.

So for a time she took up her abode in the old house, looking around her for a task to perform, and trusting that ere long she might find an excuse for quitting a place

which, in addition to its inherent gloominess, was full of sad associations; for the old housekeeper, in mistaken zeal, and with the odd fancy some such people have that it is kindness to lacerate the scarce-healed wounds of an old sorrow with perpetual reminiscences of the lost, took poor Mary over the great empty echoing mansion and pointed out where the nursery had been, and the little room where Master Tom slept as a boy, with his broken rocking-horse still stabled in one corner. The sight of the toy gave the poor bereaved mother an additional pang, for she remembered her lost child.

Mary had always been fond of and kind to children, and the birth of her own babe had seemed to open such a vista of happiness for her that her tenderness for the little ones grew stronger than ever in her

poor hungry heart. One day while wandering about in the quaint old quarter where Mr. Martindale lived, she strayed into Ormond Street, and for the first time discovered the existence of a Hospital for Sick Children. There was something that appealed to her heart at once in this association of the idea of severe sickness with childhood, and she determined to go over the hospital. At the first sight of a room with a dozen little beds occupied by tiny invalids, the tears came into her eyes, but a moment's thought reminded her that the poor little sufferers were better cared for here than they could be elsewhere, and she saw they looked happy enough, in spite of pale cheeks, with their little trays of toys before them. How cheerful the great rooms looked, and how pleasant were the smiling faces of the young nurses! Here at last she

had found an employment which would be a simple delight if she only got leave to give her services.

She went home and had a long talk with Mr. Martindale, who was very sorry to hear her determination, but eventually gave way to her wishes.

That night they talked long and late. One of the results of their conversation I must leave for a later chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

A BROKEN CONSTITUTION.

WHEN Edward Harding left Dr. Borradaile's house in Savile Row he was at a loss whither to bend his steps. He did not know anyone in town—was not even aware what brother-officers or army acquaintances might chance to be in London.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "if I take a stroll in the Park I shall be sure to meet some fellow I know."

So he turned his face westward, and before long found himself wandering solitary

by the rails of the Row. But he met no one he knew.

If there be a place to make a man feel solitary it is the Park, when he knows no one. An endless tide of life sweeps past. Lovely women and stylish men, gentle and simple, high-born and lowly, pass on, and not a single glance of recognition meets the solitary's anxious looks. He is alone in the midst of a vast world. And what makes it the more lonely is that two thirds of the people he meets are on bowing and smiling terms with each other. True, such acquaintances are in reality shallow and insincere enough in the majority of cases, but the solitary wretch pining for a word or look of sympathy has not philosophy enough to reflect on that. To him it only seems that he is quite alone in the world, and that all mankind save himself are warm friends.

Edward was oppressed with this desolate feeling as he sauntered along without meeting a single familiar face. He had never cared for society, indeed had never had much opportunity of mixing in it, his father having died while he was young, and he himself having spent the chief part of his time at Oxford. At last to his delight he saw a face that he knew—Bella's!

Now I am bound in candour to confess that absence and occupation had somewhat obliterated the image of the romantic young lady from Edward's memory. They had not corresponded—indeed Edward had neither written to, nor heard from, anybody since he left England, owing partly to a natural disinclination for epistolary labour, and partly to the uncertainty of his movements and of the posts in India from the interior during the unsettled times of the

mutiny. He had long since discovered that he did not really care for Bella; that his flirtation had been aggravated by the opposition of her father, and he entrapped by her romantic folly into a more serious situation than he had intended. Nevertheless he had always urged upon himself, as he had done in the case of Emily Prior, that he was bound to fulfil his engagement under any circumstances.

But he had never looked forward with any intense satisfaction to seeing Bella again. He was satisfied that they *would* meet again, and that he should marry her according to his promise.

Now, however, when he was solitary in the heart of London—a Robinson Crusoe desolate amid a multitude—the sight of a familiar face was very welcome, and Ted bounded forward to Bella with an ardent

joy he should never have deemed himself capable of.

Bella was on horseback, escorted by a couple of gentlemen, one being her husband, the Earl of Mountgarret, and the other Mr. Philip Charlwood, who was riding one of the earl's horses, and generally getting as much as he could out of his brother-in-law. They had just halted at the rails to converse with a tall military-looking young man who was lounging there in the most approved fashion.

Edward did not stop to consider etiquette and propriety. He had seen a well-known face, the first he had encountered since he reached England, and he hurried forward to greet it.

"My dear Bella," said he, pushing rather unceremoniously past the tall lounger—"my dear Bella, I am so delighted to see you again!"

Lady Mountgarret drew herself up and stared as haughtily as she could at Edward. The earl stared at Philip, and Philip, who guessed the state of affairs in a minute, gave a whistle of astonishment, and perhaps consternation.

Edward stood for a second irresolute, with his hand outstretched to take Bella's. It was an awkward position: neither the earl nor Philip knew how to act on such very short notice. But Bella was not so easily taken aback. She had rapidly become a woman of the world—the fashionable world—and could be rude without much rehearsal. She stared coldly at Edward.

"Excuse me, sir, you are making some mistake. I have not the honour of knowing you," said she, with perfectly collected insolence.

"Not know—what! not know *me*, Bella?

Surely I'm not so altered as that. Me!—why I'm Edward Harding. You can't surely have forgotten me?"

"I have not the honour," repeated Bella, drawing herself up and gathering the reins which she had thrown on her horse's neck.

"Nonsense!" said Edward, almost rudely. "You are Bella Charlwood, and you can't forget"——

"I never forget anything," said Bella sharply, "but I have not the honour of knowing you. Captain Vaughan," she continued, addressing the lounger, who was looking on in a state of bewilderment—"good afternoon, Captain Vaughan. Have the goodness to tell this—gentleman who I am, and explain his mistake to him. Now, my dear," she added, turning to the earl, "shall we take another turn? Come along, Philip."

And so her ladyship cantered off, leaving poor Ted utterly prostrated by her impertinence. Nor were the earl and Philip much less surprised at her audacity.

"Cool, upon my soul!" said Philip *sotto voce.*

"Cool! I consider his conduct insolent!" said my lady, giving her horse a smart cut with her riding-whip as a relief to her feelings. Philip had not intended the word to apply to Edward's conduct, but to his sister's. However, he did not think it worth while to correct her mistake, but merely said once more, "Cool, upon my soul!"

"Egad! she *is* a fine woman!" said the earl to himself, as he set spurs to his horse and followed his wife and Philip. "Egad! she is a splendid woman! I wonder if I ought to have interfered, or what was the right thing to do under the circumstances?"

Edward and Captain Vaughan were left staring blankly at one another. The latter, as might be expected, contrived to collect his thoughts first.

"Not a very courteous introduction, sir," said he, raising his hat, "but I am glad to know you. You mentioned your name——Harding—of the 203rd Berks, I presume?"

Edward bowed.

"Allow me to shake hands with you. I was reading about your Victoria Cross exploit this morning, and I assure you I am proud to meet you."

"It's very kind of you to say so; but where did you read it, may I ask?"

"Where? Why, in the *Times* this morning, of course!"

"The *Times!* What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Good heavens, man!" said the captain, carried away by surprise, "don't you know that you were gazetted this morning for the Victoria Cross?"

"I haven't seen the *Times;* indeed, I'm so out of the habit of looking at papers that I never thought of opening it, though it was on the table at breakfast at the hotel this morning?"

"Well, you certainly are the coolest hand I ever met with. You take the news of your having got the Cross as if it were an every-day occurrence."

"I have had so many things to think of latterly that I'm afraid I am getting a little callous. But I am, in my way, very proud of the distinction, I can assure you, Captain Vaughan. It was one of my dreams of ambition to win the Cross, but I never ex-

pected it would be realised. Now, when it is"—— Edward sighed and paused.

Captain Vaughan misunderstood the cause of the sigh.

"I hope you're too old a soldier to break your heart for a woman."

"Oh, it's not that! But you remind me; pray explain this late mystery. Was not that Miss Charlwood you were speaking to when I came up?"

"Well—no; it was the Countess of Mountgarret."

"I never saw so strange a resemblance."

"You don't know, then, that the Countess of Mountgarret *was* a Miss Charlwood?"

Edward started. Although he did not really love Bella, but, on the contrary, was delighted—when he reflected—that she had liberated him from a duty he was not anxious to perform, still he could not repress a

certain feeling of vexation and pique at the idea that she was another's.

"Who is this Earl of Mountgarret?" he asked his new friend.

"Well, it's only an Irish peerage. You may have known him as Marcus Lysaght."

Edward shook his head.

"He was the close friend and constant companion of her brother Philip—the other fellow who was with her just now. You didn't know him?"

"No, I was only acquainted with the father and daughter. She and I had some romantic love-passages many years ago. But that was all over. I was only glad to see her because it was the first face I had seen that I knew."

"Are you all alone in town, then?"

Edward answered that he was, being *en route* for his brother's.

"Come and dine with me at my club. It will be something to do, and even my company will be better than none at all. Say yes!"

Edward accepted the offer, put his arm through that of his new friend, and after a few more turns, sauntered off with him to his club.

"A word with you," said a gentleman to Captain Vaughan as they met for the second time.

"You'll excuse me a moment?" said Vaughan to Edward, as he drew aside with his friend.

"Vaughan," said his friend, who was, in fact, no other than Mr. Gawaine, the eminent surgeon, "who is that with you?"

"A new chum, doctor. Harding, the Victoria Cross, who was gazetted this morning."

"He won't live to wear it long, let me tell you. That's why I asked you. He has death written in his face!"

"You don't say so!" said the other, distressed. "I don't know much of him, poor fellow, but he's a fine chap, and I'm sorry you speak as you do, for I believe you're never wrong, Gawaine."

"Not often. But you had better tell him that if he wants to live he must take great care."

"He's going to dine with me to-day, and I'll take the opportunity to advise him."

"Give him some of the best and soundest champagne you can get, and don't have any peppery French or Indian messes for him, unless you want to shorten his life. Good-bye."

Vaughan did not fail to keep his promise, and told Edward after dinner that a friend

of his, a medical man, seeing Ted with him, had remarked how ill he looked, and how much care he should take of himself. Edward told him of his interview with Borradaile, and Vaughan fancied that for once, perhaps, Gawaine was a little too quick to perceive danger. He and Edward parted that night much pleased with each other, and determined to renew their acquaintance ere long.

Lady Mountgarret had seen the two walking arm-in-arm as she cantered back along the row, and gave an angry little sneer, and snubbed her brother in consequence.

"We shall have to drop Vaughan, my love," she remarked to her husband, as he lifted her from the saddle when they reached home. "He was walking with that Harding, who will no doubt fill his head with all sorts of opinions about us."

"Very well, my dear," said the easy-going nobleman. And from that time Captain Vaughan was exiled from the Mountgarret festivities, for which he did not particularly care, having many other friends.

Edward, before he and the captain turned into the club, went to a newsvendor's and despatched a number of the *Times* to his brother James. Next morning, accordingly, as James was sorting the letters which came in the bag, he found the *Times* addressed to himself in Ted's hand.

"Heyday! What have we here? Ted sending the *Times!* I suppose he thinks we never see the papers down here, which, by the way, would very likely be the case, but for your taste for newspaper reading, Markwell."

Markwell was the son and heir of a wealthy manufacturer at Birmingham. He

was reading with James for Cambridge, and was allowed all sorts of luxuries—even the *Times* at breakfast.

"Perhaps there is some news in it he wants you to see. He may have been promoted," said young Lechmere, who was being prepared for the army.

"Oh, I hope it is so, James," said Prue, who was presiding at the breakfast-table.

James Harding opened the paper and searched it through to see what Edward's object could be.

"Ted's name is not among the promotions, at any rate," he said, as he glanced over the *Gazette*, "so it isn't that." Just at this moment, however, his eye caught the name of Harding in another column. He looked, and saw the paragraph was headed "The Victoria Cross."

"'Her Majesty has been pleased,'" he

read, " 'to bestow the Victoria Cross upon Lieutenant Edward Harding, of the 203rd Regiment, Berkshire Rifles, for distinguished acts of personal bravery in rescuing a wounded brother-officer who was left on the field for dead during a skirmish with the mutineers.' "

The paragraph gave a brief account of Ted's exploit, not omitting his first rescue of Tom after the attack on the boats.

I need hardly say that both James and his wife were in a high state of glee at this news. Their gladness was a little shaded presently when on coming to read their letters they found the one from Borradaile. Then they learnt from Ted himself that he might be expected down that day. James's pupils were delighted, as such gallant young English gentlemen ought to have been, to learn the good news, and to find that they

were to have a real Victoria Cross man among them in a few hours.

The hours were counted that day at the parsonage, you may rely upon it, and the studies were but perfunctorily done. Even if James himself could have applied himself to his work heart and soul as he usually did, he could not have found fault with the lads for a noble enthusiasm which unfitted them for their labours. They would stop in the middle of an intricate problem or a difficult chorus from Æschylus to ask some little question 'about the reward "For Valour," and then a discussion of the subject would spring up and continue until James, recollecting himself, would bring them back to book.

At last the evening came. There was no pony-carriage now to send for Ted; that luxury the poor parson had been compelled

to abandon long since; but Farmer Harvey's gig was at James's disposal, and Thomas, who was still retained to attend to the garden and make himself generally useful, was despatched in due time with the vehicle to meet Edward at Scalperton.

Many an anxious look was bent towards Carptray Lane, and many a time did the eyes at the parsonage strain to catch a glimpse of the gig's return through the chestnut boughs.

Edward in the meantime was spinning rapidly along from Scalperton. How changed —like his life—was the scene from the time when he last saw it wrapped in swathes of cold ghostly mist! Now it was bathed in warm golden sunlight, the long shadows of the lofty elms stretching far across the meadows, and the milkers abroad in the pastures, with the last lark twinkling over them.

The home-bound starlings whirred overhead in dusky clouds, and the rooks slowly flapping their big black wings sailed towards their nests, uttering at intervals a sort of valedictory caw. All these thoroughly English sights were full of sweet recollection and present charm for Edward. Almost before he was aware of it they had reached Carptray Lane, and were spinning downhill towards Bremning under the broad-leaved branches of the chestnuts.

What a warm greeting it was at the parsonage-gate! There stood Prue with little Mary in her arms, and Prue the second, in whose juvenile mind mamma had been striving to revive memories of Uncle Ted, nestled by her side, half hiding her face in the folds of her mother's dress. There, too, was James, looking sadly careworn and troubled, but with a face full of joy, never-

theless, at meeting his brother again. Behind were James's pupils, whose appearance, by the way, puzzled Ted at first somewhat, until James explained, whereupon Prue said smilingly that she too had a couple of pupils, but they were in bed, as Prue and the baby would have been but for the expected arrival of their uncle.

Poor Ted was sadly knocked up with his day's journey, so he was glad enough to escape as speedily as possible from the attention of the admiring lads, and fling himself down on the sofa in James's study. Prue, having despatched the little folks to bed, came in and drew a chair up beside him, and pressed him to take some refreshment, James also joining in her entreaties.

"It's very good of you both, but I couldn't touch anything," said Ted. "Somehow, I never have any appetite now, and I am so

absurdly weak that I get knocked up with the least thing."

They soon had reason to know how weak he was, for they presently got into a quiet talk, and Ted was so distressed at hearing of their losses, and so grieved to think that they were due to him, and that he had had so much of their money for his debts, that he became quite hysterical, and it was with difficulty that they soothed him.

After this Prue was afraid to speak of Bella, but Ted, getting calmer, began to talk about her of his own accord, and, not without some anger as well as smiles, told of their meeting in the Park. Prue was very angry at her former friend's heartlessness and insolence, but she was glad to see that Ted was not suffering acutely on Bella's account. They continued talking for some time, until at last the excitement of it told

upon Ted's weakened powers, and he sank away into a dead swoon. This seriously alarmed James and his wife, and they agreed that Ted would be better in bed. They hoped next day he would have recovered from his fatigue.

CHAPTER XII.

BEQUEATHING THE CROSS.

THE next day poor Edward, instead of getting better, grew worse. The worry of travelling, the excitement of seeing old faces, and the reaction now that he was home again, all combined to aggravate his illness. It seemed as if the strength of his constitution had been so reduced that it only served to bring him back to die among his own people.

In spite of all Prue's devoted care, and in defiance of Dr. Borradaile's tonics, he grew feebler and feebler every day. He could

scarcely creep from his bed to the easy-chair by the fire, for though it was a warm autumn, the poor fellow suffered so from cold that they were compelled to have a fire in his room night and day.

James became seriously alarmed, and wrote to Dr. Borradaile describing his brother's symptoms. It would be useless, he felt, in an emergency like this, to call in the local medical man, who was able to draw a tooth or make up a rhubarb pill fairly enough, but was hardly to be trusted to do battle with Death when it came in such a form as this. It was no shame to him that he should not be able to do so. He was but a junior officer in the service, and could not fairly be expected to act as commander-in-chief in a campaign against so experienced an enemy. It is almost a pity that the healing art has not its priests and deacons

as the Church has. The credit of the profession would suffer less than it does now, when people without reflecting call in a lad fresh from the hospitals, and fancy he is as thorough a representative of English medical skill, and expect as much of him as though he had given half a lifetime to the study of that most complicated and wonderful of all machines, the human frame.

Dr. Borradaile's reply to James was not an inspiriting one. He was coming down the line on the next Sunday to see a nobleman who was a patient of his, and he would run on and see Edward in the afternoon.

Dr. Borradaile's was no easy life. To say nothing of his liability to be called on suddenly, at all hours of night or day, to attend cases of emergency, he had a regular scheme of daily labour, more than enough to satisfy

a glutton for work. He had his gratis consultations from seven till nine, his ordinary consultations from ten till one or two, his visits in the afternoon, his hospital in the evening, and his studies at night. His studies were no light ones, for he laboured till late and tried various experiments, some not less perilous than the one which cost poor Toynbee his life. "What right," some shallow people may ask, "has a doctor to expose his life to such dangers as are almost suicidal?" You do not complain of the soldier who faces almost certain death in the endeavour to save a comrade, and surely you cannot blame the surgeon who risks his life for the welfare and preservation of whole armies of his fellow-creatures!

The devotion of Borradaile to his profession was a splendid thing. He knew, without vanity, that few men in the profession

had as great experience, as great knowledge, and therefore, though he had made a fortune, and was no longer young, he did not retire. He did not even practise gratuitously, from a nice sense of fairness to his brother medical men, though to the poor and the needy he gave more than his services. As to the people who could pay, he argued that they naturally would get advice if they could for nothing, and would therefore come to him if he practised gratuitously instead of going to others who charged—and needed—fees. But if he took the guineas of the rich he gave them freely to charities, to hospitals, and in other directions, where the poor were most readily and liberally relieved, without regard to creed.

At the end of the week he visited Bremning Minor, and saw Edward. It scarcely needed Borradaile's experience to see that

Ted could not weather the winter. He gave directions for a host of little cares that would relieve the sick man's sufferings—a hundred minor things that would alleviate the weariness of illness as well as the pain.

"We can't even hope to save him, my dear lady," said he to Prue, when she spoke wonderingly of this minute forethought. "We can't even hope to save him, unless the world turns back and we have summer again instead of winter. If that were so it would be only a very slight chance indeed—with winter to come we haven't even that. But we can smooth the weary path of sickness, and a long experience of sick-rooms has taught me a number of things that would not occur to those who have not had that experience."

James tried to press his fee on him—and a big fee it was, for he had come many miles

to Bremning. But the good doctor refused the money.

"My dear sir," said he, smilingly putting back the little packet, "it would be a downright robbery. I came nearly as far as this to see old Lord Carnbrey, who has nothing on earth the matter with him except the fidgets and laziness. I make it a rule to compel him to pay heavily for robbing me of time I ought to be giving to real and urgent cases of illness. His lordship has had to draw a cheque which will more than doubly pay for this trip, and I can't in honesty take a penny from you."

This was said in such a frank, laughing way that James could not be offended, and was obliged to take the fee back, without suspecting that Borradaile had noticed or knew that there were hard times at the parsonage.

Hard times they were indeed, for James had to give up his pupils, and Prue had to send her little folk away for a holiday, because the house must be kept quiet. And there were all sorts of delicacies and dainties wanted, for poor Ted was not long in acquiring the sick man's appetite, which is a morbid craving—though a quite unconscious one—for things that are equivalent to gold —grapes at heaven knows what a pound, and chickens, and ice, when they can hardly be procured for money, much less love.

James and Prue stinted themselves sorely to get these luxuries for Edward, who knew nothing of the difficulty they had in supplying his costly tastes. Ah, how poor Prue wished now that her novels had sold! She was almost tempted at times, while she was sitting up with the invalid, to take her pen

again, and see if there were not something to be won by it.

So the autumn wore on. The woods turned from green to gold, from gold to russet, and the woodland paths got deeper and deeper in dead leaves. The swallows, with multitudinous chirpings, made their great assembly on the roofs, and betook themselves to warmer climes. The mists gathered in of an evening, and when first the morning broke there were sparkling patches of hoar-frost on the lawns and in the meadows.

The curtains were closed earlier and earlier each evening. The daylight grew shorter and shorter, and dimmer and dimmer, and in the long nights the rain sobbed and the winds moaned until those long nights seemed even longer to the wakeful watchers in the sick-room.

And still poor Edward grew no better. Dr. Borradaile came down to see him twice unasked. He made excuse that he had been to Lord Carnbrey's, and had just run on. But in truth Carnbrey had taken his imaginary ills to the Continent, and was spending the latter end of the year in Paris. But James did not discover the kindly fable. Borradaile had been fighting a desperate battle. He knew what terrible siege the winter would lay to the ruined fortress he had to defend, and his only chance was to throw in supplies, so he was giving Edward the most powerful tonics, in the faint hope of carrying him through the cold months.

But his second visit told him that all his labour was in vain. He told James of the struggle he had made, and of his failure, and bade him prepare to lose his brother. It was a sore trial for poor James, and scarcely

less so to Prue, who was tenderly attached to Ted, not only because he was her husband's brother, but for his own sake, and because she had been his friend and confidante in his love troubles—a sure guarantee for a woman's sympathy and regard.

The winter was deepening around them fast now. The trees were stripped of their leaves, and the flowers were fast waning—so fast that Prue found it difficult to supply the little glass which poor Ted liked to see full of flowers on the table by his bedside. Luckily Prue had all her faithful school-children to rely on. She had only to tell them that she wanted flowers for the sick-room, and if there were any to be had within miles they would get them for her. But still bouquets became scarcer and scarcer, and as they became scarcer the sick man's strength faded away too. The snow had

fallen once or twice and hushed the earth in its white shroud, and chained the rivulets.

And then Edward felt that he should not live to see the spring. The consciousness grew upon him in the weary long nights when the watchers by his bed believed he was asleep; but he was only lying quiet with closed eyes, wondering if death was anything very different from this.

When James, at Dr. Borradaile's request, began to warn his brother that his life was despaired of, he found that Edward had learnt that truth of Nature herself, and was quite prepared.

"I know, Jim! I know what you're going to tell me. Don't put yourself to the pain, old fellow. My sick leave will be over sooner than the medical board expected when they sent me home. And—there, Jim,

give me your hand. We must all part some day, and I'm very glad I'm going home."

That same afternoon, when Prue came up, as she was accustomed to do when the children were having their after-dinner sleep, Ted called her and her husband to his bedside.

"Sit down, there's good people, and tell me all about yourselves. I have been sick and selfish since I've been here, but I'm better now, and I want to know all your doings."

They sat down on the edge of the bed, one on each side, holding his hands. There was silence for a little while, but by degrees they fell into a low whispering talk, and opened their hearts to each other, and Edward learnt all their troubles and trials.

"And you suffered all this for me and for Bella, when neither of us deserved your

care. I should like to live now if only to try and repair the wrong."

"It was no wrong, Ted," said Prue. "We loved you too dearly to mind a little suffering, if we could only have kept your charge safely."

"You brave little woman!" said Ted. "She should have been a soldier, Jim, to win the cross you and I used to talk of."

"And you have won!"

"For no greater a deed than yours, Prue. What I did I did for love of Tom Martindale. But how have you got on with the Squire since?"

They told him.

"Then you have never had that money restored to you?"

James shook his head.

"What a shame! And this, then, was the reason why you took pupils. I wonder-

ed that you should do so, for I've heard you say you did not think it right for a man with a parish to take pupils."

"Not if he neglects his parish for them, Ted," said Prue; "but James has not done that."

"At all events I have had a very energetic curate, Ted."

"A curate?"

"Yes; Prue here has worked as zealously as if she was seeking a title."

"You both praise me too highly. I don't deserve it. I have only tried to do some of my duties as a wife because I neglected one."

"Which was that?" asked Edward, smiling.

"It is a wife's duty to have no secrets from her husband, is it not?" she asked.

The two brothers laughingly assented. But Prue was not joking, she was taking an

opportunity to rid herself of a secret that had been a sad burden for a long time past. She told the story of her authorship, related all her worries with the publishers, the appearance of her novel, and the swindle of Mr. Mudsill.

Edward and James were astonished, James especially, for he had never for an instant suspected that his wife's writing had been of a literary nature.

"Well, Prue, I used to think you were very often puzzling over the bills, but I fancied it was because you were trying to keep down the expenses, with our narrowed means. I never dreamt you were an authoress. You might have sent me a copy of the novel."

"And have heard you condemn it, ignorant of the pain it would have given me. No, I had not the courage."

"Yet she had the courage, Jim, to go and fight those publishing fellows, and to put herself at the mercy of the regular critics with their tomahawks. No courage to send you a copy! Well, you must be something more terrible than all the publishers and all the reviewers together."

"So he is, for he is my husband, and I could not have borne to hear him blame my poor effort to swell our scanty purse."

The two men looked at her in silent admiration.

They had faced danger, these two. James had fought his hand-to-hand battle with death in a terrible form in the cholera times at Liverchester. He had breathed the breath of pestilence, and taken fierce fever by the hand. He had faced trouble as unflinchingly as he had faced death. He had in the pursuit of duty given up himself

entirely, had suffered loss, and had worked with stern determination to repair it without departing a hair's-breadth from the path of duty and honour.

Edward had looked death in the face too. He had fought gallantly, and he had performed a deed of heroic devotion that fairly won him the coveted Cross of Valour, to say nothing of his bravery during the siege at Ungawallah, or of the daring with which he rescued the little party that had escaped from the massacre on the river.

But these two men felt that their gallantry in going out against active danger was not so grand a thing as the quiet endurance of the brave little woman who had gone through trials and troubles, and attempted —ay, and performed—tasks of difficulty they would have counted insurmountable.

We men are very apt to talk about

"lords of creation," the "weaker sex," with a variety of set phrases which are universally recognised, but which are utterly erroneous. We are bold enough and lordly enough with a noisy danger—something that we can have the excitement of a struggle against, but we cannot passively endure the torture which the "weaker" sex can bear unflinchingly. And yet that is the more difficult part to play, that passive part. For instance, take the case of a rickety gig with a skittish horse being driven along a mountain road with a precipice on one side. Most people would prefer of the two occupants of the gig to be the driver. He has at least the partial control of his fate, and the excitement of straining every nerve to avoid the perils in his path. The other must sit perfectly still, must not disturb his companion by a ner-

vous action of alarm, must not lay his hand on the rein or say a word. In most cases this is the woman's part in life, and she acquits herself nobly in it.

"Jim," said Edward, "do you remember that talk we had in your study a long time ago about the three-penn'orth of bronze?"

James nodded assent.

"I remember you said that you'd give half you possessed to win it."

"And you, Ted, declared you would win it, and you have kept your word."

Ted put his poor wasted hand under his pillow, and drew out the scrap of metal with its bit of ribbon. He laid it on the bed in front of him, and they all looked at it in silence with full hearts.

"There, Jim," said Ted at last, "there's the threepenn'orth of bronze we were both so proud to think of, so anxious to win.

After all, though it seems such a valueless thing, it is worth I can't tell how much. We can't be certain—I can't, at any rate—that what I have done would have been done if I had not known there was such a cross."

"You wrong yourself, Ted. I don't believe you thought of it."

"I hope not; but my knowledge that there was such a reward may have influenced me—at all events, lays me open to suspicion."

James shook his head.

"Ay, you may do that, but I believe even you have possibly stirred yourself to stouter endurance and sterner struggles by dreaming about this. You knew of it and longed for it, and it is possible that your inner self has said, 'I can't win it, but I can deserve it,' and so you have fought on. We knew

of it, and, unconsciously perhaps, have been influenced by it. But Prue, I believe, never thought a bit about it till she heard I had got it."

James thought it likely.

"There it lies then, Jim. We have done our best; but can that count with her bravery?"

And he took up the cross and laid it in Prue's lap.

"For Valour, Prue!" he whispered in a faint voice, and then, exhausted with the excitement of talking, he sank back on the pillows.

It was the last flicker of the expiring lamp of life. As Prue and her husband sat watching Ted, who lay for a few minutes with closed eyes, breathing heavily, they saw he was trying to speak.

They bent over him. His eyes opened for a moment, and as he pressed their hands

he murmured, "Wear it for memory of me;" and then the eyes closed again, the grasp relaxed, and Prue and her husband were alone in the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNSET AFTER RAIN.

THEY buried Edward Harding under the great yew-tree in Bremning churchyard. It is a pleasant, quiet resting-place—God's-acre, where his children sleep peacefully under the canopy of His blue sky, more glorious than the grandest cathedral roof ever raised over king or hero. The green fields stretch away on all sides of it, and in summer there is a choir of larks always chanting matins and vespers.

They laid him in an unassuming grave. A simple stone records his name and the dates

of his birth and death, and there is a little medallion above on which is carved a representation of the Victoria Cross.

The stone is visited with great solemnity and awe by those lads of Bremning who have —as most boys have—an early fit of martial longing. They tell wonderful stories of Edward's doings in the Indian Mutiny, attributing to him all the acts of bravery they hear spoken of or read about.

The simple villagers as they wind up along the church path of a Sunday, while the bell is summoning them with its clear treble, pause as they pass the grave, and read the inscription for the hundredth time, and give a sigh.

The clerk points it out reverently to any visitors who may secure his services to show them over the church. Even Bella Charlwood—I beg her ladyship's pardon, the

Countess of Mountgarret—I am told, regards the resting-place of Edward Harding with respect. She speaks of him very kindly as an old friend of her family, and says how much they regretted his untimely death, for he was such a nice person and a very promising young officer.

You see, while he was alive he was an inconvenient acquaintance, but now that he is dead, and was decorated with the grandest of our orders, civil or military, her ladyship finds it desirable to speak warmly of his friendship. She even displays a little of her old romantic spirit about him, and tells people they were brought up as children together, and relates all sorts of anecdotes about his youthful prowess which have no foundation save in her fertile imagination.

The earl, I fancy, is beginning to get rather tired of her ladyship now. They

have no family, and she is very fond of running about on the Continent, which he, being of an indolent disposition, does not care about.

The earl's temper was not improved, I fear, by the discovery that the estates had been considerably "dipped" during his father's lifetime. It must be rather trying to a man's temper to discover this when he is at the same time conscious that he is blessed with a wife who is anything but economical.

As for Philip Charlwood, his brotherly desire to share his purse (which was empty) with the earl, on condition that the earl should return the compliment with his, was novel, but not agreeable. His noble brother-in-law got out of temper with him one day, and told him that he had enough to do to supply one of the Charlwood family with all

the money she wanted, and that he had no intention, when he married Bella, of wedding her brother's fortunes or debts.

Philip found that his friend Joe Davison was speedily acquainted with the coolness between the earl and himself, and Joe's friendship cooled too. Funds therefore ran short, and what was more, Joe would not renew. In his despair, Philip reduced his expenditure, sold off a lot of luxuries, and went back to his chambers in the Temple, and looked out for briefs. But, alas for Philip! clerks had brought briefs to that door until they were tired of reading that "Mr. Charlwood was out of town on important business." So briefs found another channel, and when Philip went into court he saw fresh faces, and there was a Mr. Sebright who was doing all the business that had been his, and his quondam brother-counsel

—that is, those whose position was such that he had deigned to associate with them—had got drafted off to county-court judgeships, or recorderships, or appointments of some kind or another. He tried to move the paternal heart, but the paternal coffers being low he failed to move it to any solid benefit. Meantime things began to grow unpleasant. He received a quiet hint from his banker that he must not overdraw. Davison threatened him with arrest. His tradesmen had little bills to settle, and wanted his small account.

Philip took the hint. He went off for a week to the Continent, and has never since returned. He haunts the German gambling-places, where he fixes himself on young Englishmen, to whom he relates the ingratitude of his family, his brother-in-law, and the world at large—to whom he relates also

that, having won enormously, he intends to return to England, and pay off everything, and start afresh, and whom lastly, though not leastly, he fleeces.

The Squire has heard of his doings through some kind friend, and has disowned him. All his unentailed property will go to Bella, therefore—and that before very long, I fancy, for the old man gets sourer and sourer every day, and must shortly die of his own acidity. The servants all dread him, and keep out of his way as much as possible. The villagers shun a meeting with him, and, as for the children, they fly at the sight of him. This is not a pleasant existence. The only enjoyment he gets he obtains by distraining for rent, which he does ruthlessly the moment it is at all in arrear.

Mr. Golding, Prue's uncle, came to London, where he obtained a position as mana-

ger of a joint-stock bank. The venture was not a very successful one, and at last a few over-inquisitive shareholders insisted on scrutinizing the way in which business was done. They found that owing to the ignorance, carelessness, and incompetence of most of the directors, and with the complicity of a few, the manager had been buoying up a rotten scheme by transactions which were, in point of fact, neither more nor less than fraudulent. He was taken into custody, and eventually committed, but the jury acquitted him as being rather an instrument in the hands of a few directors than a felon on his own account and for his own purposes. But the result was social ruin as far as he was concerned. He struggled on for a short time as a promoter—an office for which a man does not require, as a rule, either capital or character. But he must

have experience, and that Mr. Golding wanted; so after launching a few bubbles only to see them collapse immediately, he vanished, and—so it is reported—betook himself to Australia, where he started sheep-farming. His house in Liverchester has been converted into a bank, far more prosperous than the once famous firm of Golding and Glyther. George Golding, Esq., junior, late of the Laurels, Liverleas, who had been the managing partner, is stated to be somewhere in the same quarter of the globe as his uncle. He is reported to have turned out, in the hands of a Government official, to be a very clever road-mender. He is liberally supported by the whole British community, in consideration of his having ruined a portion of it. His meals are regular, his labours not excessive, and his uniform is yellow.

I know very well that this is not as it should be in novels. But I have desired rather to make this a reflex of real life than a properly-composed three-volume fiction. Some of my villains certainly have come to grief, but it seems to me as if it was their own doing, and due to no improper interference on my part. There is one sort of justice that awaits ill-doers—one punishment that haunts them. It is necessary that they should never let themselves be found out. If they once suffer themselves to be seen in their true colours, justice and punishments await them. If they can only hide their roguery decently—even with a Coan veil (provided it is never lifted)—there is no reason that I know why they should not die universally lamented and respected, and have a handsome monument raised over them. If Philip Charlwood had not let the world, through

Davison, find him out, he might still be figuring among the fashionables. If the Goldings had not permitted themselves to be detected, they would not now be breathing the pure atmosphere of Australia.

It is time, perhaps, to turn from the consideration of the rogues to the honest folk again.

In the quiet hospital in Great Ormond Street, with the lofty, clean, cool rooms and the pleasant garden, with the rows of tiny cots, and the tiny patients lying in them, you will find Mary Martindale. "Nurse Gentle" some of the children have christened her. As she moves about with a calm, sweet smile among the little ones, visitors do not suspect that she carries a broken heart about with her; but she finds a balm for her own sorrow in lightening that of others. Many and many a blessing is show-

ered upon her, many and many a prayer breathed for her by grateful mothers—poor women who underwent the great pang and let their children be taken from them to the hospital out of feverish alleys and streets, because they knew it was for their children's good, and who rejoice to hear the little ones prattle of Nurse Gentle, and know they have a mother's care, though they are separated from them. In this peaceful and blessed path of duty Mary will tread while her time is appointed on earth. Some day when they come to rouse her they will find that Nurse Gentle is beyond human waking, and that all that is left of her is the frail worn body over whose still heart the thin hands are clasping two locks of hair—her husband's and her child's.

Not long after Ted's funeral Mr. Martindale called upon James. He had come

down from London specially to see him, and they were closeted together in the study for a long time.

It was a sad interview. The old man was utterly broken now. He implored James's forgiveness for thinking so ill of him for his kindness to Tom. He was so humbled, so despairing to find that he had lost all that made life pleasant for the sake of worldly show that was worthless, and had sacrificed his beloved boy out of the desire for the good opinion of people who had not scrupled to make a victim of him for their own aims and ends, that James felt quite ashamed to have this fine old grey-headed gentleman abasing himself before him, and he talked wisely and kindly to him until poor Mr. Martindale fairly wept, and then, his heart relieved, was better than he had been for long.

"But I must tell you my errand, Mr. Harding. I am a childless old man. My daughter, Tom's widow, though she has entirely forgiven the wrongs I have done her, does not care to live with me. She has felt herself called upon to undertake a task which will divert her thoughts from her own bereavement. It was scarcely to be expected she would have cared to live with me. Then I hoped that your brother, who knew, and, I believe, liked me, would consent to take his friend's place—would be a second son to me, and let me take a father's interest in him. At all events, I hoped he would let me try to prove my gratitude to him for saving my boy from falling into the hands of those wretches. Alas! all my best intentions are thwarted. Had my ill-doings but failed thus, I should not be childless and solitary now! I find I have only come to visit your

brother's grave, and breathe my unavailing thanks over his coffin. You must let me find a friend in you. Take pity on a grey-headed, wretched, lonely man; suffer me to put to a good use riches that have no value for me unless they enable me to be of service to the brother of one to whom I owed so much."

James's first impulse was to decline the offer, and say that he was quite well enough off; but he could not say so without hesitation, and Mr. Martindale saw that what he said was not true. He pressed his offer so kindly and so delicately, that it seemed rather as if he were asking James to confer a benefit on him.

Finally, he did not know exactly how, James found himself confiding all his cares and troubles to Mr. Martindale as freely as if he had been his father. Prue coming in

presently—not knowing the old gentleman was there—was drawn into the conversation too.

The upshot was that, after all their pinchings and privations, better days dawned for the Hardings.

Mr. Martindale offered them a living he had in his gift in the West of England, but James preferred to stay and continue the good work in his old parish. Mr. Martindale stayed with them for some time, and was not long in discovering that the Squire was one of James's bitterest thorns in the flesh. He set himself quietly to see if he could not remedy the evil.

He found that the old man had lost considerably by the failure of Golding and Glyther, and had great difficulty in holding his own; so he set a clever lawyer at him, who contrived to talk old Charlwood over into

selling the estate. He had no son to inherit it, and his daughter would be better pleased with the money invested for her sole benefit. The Squire liked the idea, and the sale was effected.

Mr. Martindale was the buyer.

All had been done so quietly that the Squire's removal to town took every one by surprise. I believe the old rascal sneaked away for fear they should ring the bells in their joy at getting rid of him.

What was the surprise of James and Prue when they received orders to move into the Manor-house, and found that Mr. Martindale was the new Squire, and intended to take up his abode there permanently.

Different times had come now for Bremning Minor. It was picturesque still as it had been in the Squire's best days. But the picturesqueness was not that of ruin and

decay. The wretched old cottages were replaced by roomy, well-ventilated new ones. The poisonous brook was purified and flowed sweet and clear through the village, for the new Squire had a properly-arranged system of drains made.

The only people who grumbled now were some of the farmers. They had lost their old despotic power over their labourers. Whenever they were guilty of any acts of petty oppression the Squire was sure to learn it, and they heard of it again. Mr. Martindale was an old disciplinarian, and he managed his people as he had managed his office. He was kindly and considerate, but he had no mercy for wrong-doers. If a tenant of his was guilty of injustice to his poorer neighbours he received notice to quit, and he had to quit, for the new Squire never revoked orders.

So in time the village got purified of the hard men who had come there as if drawn instinctively towards Mr. Charlwood. They went away by degrees, to carry a blight elsewhere. New and enterprising men came in their places, and there was always a good demand for labour, and no niggardliness about wages.

A happier village than Bremning Minor you would not find throughout the length and breadth of England—indeed, I fear you would find only too few like it.

Prue the Second and Little Mary grew up to be graceful girls, and were old enough to be the proud nurses of a little brother Tom who was born presently. They were only amateur nurses, for Martha Ogleby still retained her old post until Master Tommy was old enough to run alone. When he had arrived at that mature age, Martha explained,

with considerable circumlocution and confusion, that she was very miserable, but she was to be the happy bride of the gardener who had succeeded Thomas. She so balanced her misery at leaving with the bliss she looked forward to with the man of her choice, that it was impossible to say how she could have made up her mind to change her state except by tossing up.

To her unspeakable delight she was told that she and her husband should be installed at the lodge, so that she would still be near her mistress and children. Under these circumstances Martha's future was one of unalloyed brightness, and a more contented bride, with a broader smile of undisguised delight, never walked up the aisle of the church of Bremning Minor.

And if she was happy as a bride, Martha was happier still as a wife. The lodge had

a back entrance to the stables, and a corner of the stable-yard was apportioned to it for washing purposes. It was an understood thing that the lodge-keeper's wife was to do all the washing of the Manor-house. I need hardly say—for I hope my readers by this time know Martha's little weaknesses—that this prospect opened up a steamy vista of future happiness to our old friend. Imagine an endless succession of soapsuds and fluttering lines of linen—an everlasting state of rolled-up sleeves and pale, crumply fingers —an unchanging future of pattens, steam, slop, boiling coppers, pegs, and clothes-props. Martha's wildest dreams had never pictured anything like this. Nor was this all. Martha had another worship besides washing, you remember. Here, too, she was blessed. Every year, as became so orderly and methodical a person, she presented her hus-

band with a baby, each baby, in turn, being the most wonderful child the world ever beheld. Such mottled arms, such marvellous fingers, such eyes, such downy heads, such early teeth! James declared that he did not see how the list of English Christian names, male and female, could supply such a family, the run on its capabilities was so severe. But they all grew up and prospered. The boys were put to various occupations, the girls were all brought up by the mother to be good servants, good wives, and especially good washerwomen. On washing-day there was always to be seen a row of tubs, with Martha and her girls up to their elbows in suds—a nicely graduated row, beginning with Martha, and ending at that one of the smaller girls who could, by dint of a stool and a pair of pattens, be brought to something like a level with her tub.

There is sunshine, then, flooding Bremning Minor. The autumn is just beginning, with cloudless skies of intense blue. The hedgerows are rich with autumn blossom and fruit—sweet with the fragrance of eglantine and bright with bramble-berries. The hillsides are dark velvety green, and here and there on the slopes are stretches of yellow waving corn, like squadrons of cavalry with gilded helms charging across the meadows, with bright poppies for crimson flags.

The great grave kine are standing in the pools under the shade of the willows. The brooks swollen by the rains, that make all around look so freshly green, babble among their pebbles or roar into miniature cascades. And the golden sunlight floods the whole scene.

There are twinkling drops on the boughs and on the blades of grass. For a shower

has lately passed—the grey cloud that bore it is yet hanging a dim slanting curtain along the distant horizon. But the present is but the fairer for the bygone rain—a myriad of diamonds, purer than the diamonds of the mine, for they have been cradled in the bosom of the blue heavens, are sparkling on every side.

So do past tears, purified by faith and noble endurance, become jewels that make brighter our present happiness. The best gold is that which has been longest tried in the furnace, and that heart is most golden which has learned in suffering a sympathy for others, and feels a grateful rejoicing in the blessings which are permitted to lighten and relieve the cares of life.

James and his wife stand arm-in-arm under the boughs of the dark yew that spreads above Edward's grave. They are

looking up the slopes, but their eyes take no heed of the scene. They are fixed upon the past.

There is sunshine over Bremning Minor. There is sunshine on the hearts there. But the sun shines upon graves in Bremning, and upon recollections of the dead in those hearts.

Because there is no repining, the dear ones are not forgotten. Standing by the grave, with the sun streaming round them, they are gazing, not on the grave, but beyond it. They know they shall meet the beloved dead again hereafter. They have something to live for—something to die for. The memory of a great sorrow hallows life, as the shadow of the yew lends a deeper gold to the beams that pour over the grass where no shadow lies.

And as they stand by Edward's grave,

James and Prudence cling closer to each other, but they do not speak. Their hearts are communing together, and drinking deeply of the peace which comes after trouble bravely combated and suffering nobly undergone. So it is that in Prue's heart there is peace, and on her heart reposes the little bronze cross with the simple inscription, "For Valour."

THE END.


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LONDON: PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018